

The Island



Bertha
Runkle

b. in N.J.

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Ametila Suayardo



She left to him the first speech

THE ISLAND

BY

BERTHA RUNKLE

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RIDER," "STRAIGHT DOWN THE CROOKED LANE,"
"THE TRUTH ABOUT TOLNA," etc.

Very Dumb Book



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1921

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Printed in U. S. A.

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CHAPTER I

CERTAINLY the block was respectable. Carrington, looking about him with the curiosity of a tourist—he didn't suppose he had explored this Morningside region in twenty years; no, not since the college moved up—told himself he could detect in the air of the street a combined odor of sheepskin from the university, of iodoform from St. Luke the Physician's, of sanctity from St. John the Divine's. It was not what he had expected. Nor was the frank shabbiness of the flat-house, its history written out in the heel-marks on the stairs, the scribbles on the wall paint, the scars in the plaster. Run up hastily and flimsily in the open lots, almost open fields, surrounding the new site of Columbia University, it had by this time sheltered almost a generation of lean-pursed

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instructors, of students "baching" together or boarding with some harassed widow. And now, most incongruously, it sheltered the celebrated Miss Mary Lea.

Having an elevator, the house had its inevitable concomitant, a negro boy lounging at the telephone switchboard. The expression of supercilious boredom with which he regarded the visitor's entrance reminding Carrington precisely of the expression he frequently found surrounding him in opera boxes and drawing-rooms, it occurred to him to wish that in society he might dissipate it with his first word, as easily as he did now.

"Yassir, she live here, sir," the boy straightened up in his interest. "But she do n't see no one 'thout they send up they name. She do n't see no one mornings, sir. She practises."

"This is a business appointment. Announce me, please. Mr. Carrington."

"Yassir." Ducking to the mouthpiece, he rolled big eyes at the gentleman. Carrington fancied that, to his general curiosity about all

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the celebrity's affairs, the boy now added a particular curiosity about this one; that he recognized the name and guessed the errand. However, what matter? He had not looked forward to finding any moment of his embassy agreeable.

"Miss Dewey, she say to come up," the boy reported. The old elevator feebly creaked its way to the top floor, to a purblind little landing where Carrington groped for a door-bell.

The door was opened by a middle-aged spinster in a clean, well-starched, gingham dress and apron—a servant's dress, yet Carrington did not think her a servant. Probably the Miss Something who had directed his coming up, whose name he had been too much annoyed to note. As she began protestingly, "Why, Bill, you know you promised—" the light from windows in the flat penetrated the dimness. She broke off suddenly.

"My name *is* Carrington," its owner assured her with a slight smile. "May I see Miss Lea?"

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"Excuse me," she said a little breathlessly, a flush sweeping across her thin cheeks. Though she had instantly renounced her impulse to slam the door, her apology admitted quite artlessly that she had felt it. "I'll see. Please to be seated in there."

The small room he entered was furnished as a dining-room, with a cheap set of Mission oak. On the table stood a pot of ferns. The sunny window-sill was gay with a box of cyclamens and begonias, delightfully thrifty; he could fancy them the spinster's special care.

She went down the narrow passage toward the sound of piano music, some sort of dance tune, sharply accented. It stopped in the middle of a measure. A shabby man with a music roll presently appeared, to let himself out. In another moment the spinster announced, "Miss Lea wants you should come into the studio." She hesitated, clearly desirous of adding something to this colorless message, then, deciding against it, led the way silently up the railroad-car gangway. But, with her

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hand on the door-knob, abruptly she turned to him.

"Mr. Carrington, don't be hasty! Wait till you get acquainted."

Opening the door, she fairly pushed him in, closing it after him with a nervous bang.

The large room, designed for a painter's studio, was bleakly lighted by a skylight, and by a row of north windows, all open at the top to the January air. (Carrington was glad that he had not felt sufficiently at home to remove his overcoat.) At the far end of the room, a piano. Screwed on opposite walls, a pair of enormous mirrors, a sort of hurdle extending itself between. Two kitchen chairs pushed back in a corner. Nothing else broke the glittering expanse of waxed floor except the figure of Miss Lea herself.

Carrington did n't know what he had supposed dancers put on to practise their steps in. Not a Mother Hubbard, certainly. Certainly, too, these last few years had accustomed him to nudity, not only across the footlights, but seated unconcernedly beside one

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at dinner. What he was n't used to was the morning hour, the pitiless light, the temperature but little above freezing. Miss Lea wore a sleeveless tunic, beginning just below the throat and ending about half-way between thigh and knee. She wore also a pair of fur-lined slippers into which, evidently, she had just thrust her bare feet.

His next rapid, confused impression was that, like everything else in the flat, the girl looked clean. Her immaculate white tunic was no fresher than her fine-grained white skin. Her hair, dressed in braids that covered her small head like a cap, shone from hard brushing. He had thought it black; now he saw it was deep brown, showing auburn lights in the ripples. Neither were her eyes black, but a dark hazel—Here his third impression grew so vivid that he wondered he had been able to notice anything else. "Why, the child's beautiful!" On the stage she had looked her part, the Jewel of the Harem, but he had not expected to find her beauty touching, clean and young.

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Standing perfectly still in the middle of the room, she left to him the first speech. He reflected that he had never seen any one stand so still, without tension and without fidgeting.

"Miss Lea?" he bowed to her, advancing somewhat gingerly over the polished floor. "The Miss Lea who is a friend of my son's?"

"Yes," she answered simply. She did n't add that she was pleased to meet him. Carrington was grateful to her for that.

"I've interrupted your work," his tone made courteous apology. "But I was very anxious to find you at home."

She was watching him as warily as a hostile Indian. At this, "Won't you sit down?" she invited, civil, but still unsmiling. Before he could forestall her she had moved swiftly to bring a chair from the corner and place it for him, quite, Carrington thought, as they do on the stage.

With an "Allow me," he advanced to place the other chair for her. Over the back of it lay a white wool affair like a bather's wrap,

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and this she now picked up and put on. Why not earlier, he wondered. Had she honestly not thought of it? For underneath her stony self-possession he guessed her embarrassed, as under his good manners he was, himself.

"I had the pleasure—and it was a pleasure indeed—" he began politely, "of seeing you dance last night." Suddenly, the intense gravity of them both struck him as ridiculous; he, at least, was coming down off his stilts. "In the piece, you're supposed to be fifteen, aren't you? And you look it. But I did n't expect you to look it off the stage."

"I am twenty-two." She stated a matter of fact.

"I expected you to be older, to have reached the position you have. How long have you been at it?"

"Four years, on the stage. I've danced all my life."

"You come of professional people?"

"Not in that sense. My father was a country doctor. He wanted me to study medicine."

Though she was still unbending, spoke in

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curt, reluctant phrases, her voice betrayed now a hint of amusement, of the perception of incongruity that is humor. Till this meeting he had not heard her speak. The theatrical riot of which she was ringleader was a *mêlée* of crude color, changing lights, perpetual motion, drums and brass, just saved from madness by the silence of the actors. On his journey hither Carrington had lamented that in private life Miss Lea would n't prove dumb. Now he admitted that though he might n't approve what she 'd have to say, her speech did n't remind him, as he had thought it probably would, of the princess from whose lips dropped toads. She did n't twang or drawl or burr. Her voice, even while she tried to keep it colorless and cold, was resonant with vitality. Carrington wished he could have her at the switchboard in his office.

To the undernote of amusement in her tone, he responded with a smile. After all, she was perhaps less the hostile Indian than the watchful Indian prepared to reach for a

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peace-pipe or a tomahawk as the paleface might decree.

"Medicine?" he repeated. "That did n't appeal to you?"

"Yes, it did." She came to a full stop, then after a moment unexpectedly went on: "I was in my first year at the university at Berkeley—I'm a Californian—when Father died suddenly. He had n't saved a cent; how could he? I might have worked my way through. But it's such a long course, eight years. There was nobody to lend me any money. We'd always lived up in the hills, among poor people. Anyhow, I don't like begging. This way, I was independent from the first."

He was almost afraid to speak, lest he startle her out of this new expansiveness, as the least movement will startle a half-tamed animal. He wanted immensely to hear her go on, to hear her tell what kind of person she was. In Carrington's view, once you had found out what kind people were, what had made them do as they did, you could always discover a way to deal with them. As she

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paused, he prompted, half absently, not looking at her, "You 'd danced, you say, all your life?"

"My father believed in women doing things, having professions. He said that when they could n't make good in men's work, it was because they had n't men's strength, and that there was no reason in nature why a woman could n't be as strong and tough and well-balanced as a man. He gave a great deal of thought and care to my physical training. There were some Russians ranching near us; there 's every nationality out there. One of the women had belonged to the Imperial Ballet. She told us she was exiled for political reasons, but Father thought more likely she had tried to stab a hated rival. Anyhow, there she was in the foot-hills. I began dancing with her when I was four years old."

"That 's very interesting. Tell me how you went on the stage."

"I had made a hit in a college show. That gave me the idea I could do it. I 'd always loved dancing, but I was n't stage-struck,

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then. I'd always been bent on following Father. I never thought of the stage, till I had to think of something mighty quick. I went over to San Francisco and got a job with a revue. I was with that company two years, all over the country in various things. Last year I did specialties in 'The Girl and the Gadfly.' And then Schumann sent for me and gave me *Morgiana*."

"Was n't it pretty hard?" Carrington inquired. "The chorus work, I mean. The traveling, the one-night stands. All the conditions of the life."

"Yes, it's hard. But I'm very strong."

"I didn't mean the physical hardships only."

"You mean the men and girls are pretty tough, some of them? There's a lot of rough stuff? There is, of course, but if you don't want to mix in it, you do n't have to. I always said to myself, 'I'm here, but I'm not going to stay here.'"

"That attitude of yours—how did it strike them?"

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"‘Upstage.’ They did n’t bother me much."

"Still, I should think some might have bothered."

"No." She shook her head, her thoughts indrawn. "You see, it was the way Father brought me up. Girls—they’re given the idea they’re more or less helpless. I mean, the odds are against them. Father never let that notion enter my mind. He made me understand that a girl could stand right up to anything. It’s true, too. If a girl’s nervous and always afraid she’ll meet a villain, she just invites him to pursue. But if she’s merely absent-minded and bored, she bores him."

The talk was proceeding as easily as if they were dinner partners. Carrington never believed in bluster, not even to the vulgar little painted hussy he had feared to find. But because he was willing to listen to her, she was not to suppose that she carried him with her. He took the opportunity to observe, quietly but deliberately: "I see. If you do n’t

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want a man's attentions, you know how to end them."

Certainly she stood right up to this.

"Now we're talking of Bill."

Carrington liked the directness of her.

"That was what I came for."

"It was Mr. Fordyce?" she asked. "I thought so. And I sat up half the night filling hot-water bags for his wife."

Though Fordyce's behavior was scarcely the point at issue, loyalty to the absent constrained a protest.

"He's a very old friend of mine. It was not in a spirit of malicious gossip——"

"No," she assented dryly. "He felt it his duty." After a moment she added, "What did he tell you?"

He found he could n't say to her the blunt words she deserved to hear. "About the sleet-storm, and how he and his wife took refuge at a farm-house, not knowing whom it belonged to, or even just where they were. They found there, besides the farmer and his wife, a young man and a young woman—city folks, who in-

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roduced themselves as brother and sister. The farm belonged to their family, it appeared; they were in the habit of going up for week-ends.

"My friend almost instantly recognized the girl; he had seen 'Morgiana' several times. The boy puzzled him for a while. Though he has known me many years he has never happened to encounter my son. (Bill, I suppose, did n't place him at first, or he would n't have lied so childishly.) Still, the boy seemed familiar to Fordyce; he somehow associated him with public appearances, though he could n't think him in the least like an actor. Finally, he remembered football fields. Remembered, too, that we used to spend our summers on a farm in the hills of Putnam County."

He paused, but as she sat silent in that remarkable quietude of hers, he added, "Is that a truthful account?"

"Yes. It was Bill, and it was I."

"Are you Bill's wife?"

"What does Bill say?"

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"I've not asked him." Carrington hesitated a minute, then admitted his embarrassment with a frank smile. "I've not asked Bill. You will say I came here because I expected to find you easier to bully. It is n't that entirely. Because I am Bill's father, it is extraordinarily difficult for him and me to have an honest talk. The parental relation keeps getting into it. I'm old enough to be your father, but since I do n't happen to be, since, if you like, we're strangers, I hope you and I can talk together, settle our differences without bloodshed."

"And besides, if we're not married, it would be better to buy me off before Bill hears anything about it."

Carrington acknowledged the hit.

"If I did come here to buy off a harpy, I've abandoned the notion. It does n't appear to fit the case."

"It does not fit the case!" she cried, with the first heat she had shown. "I make a bigger income than Bill's, that his grandfather left him. I make bigger money than he'll

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get when he's graduated and goes into that broker's office. I'll have my raises every year, quicker and surer and bigger than his. You need n't think I'm after Bill because he's a rich man's son."

"Well," said his father, "I own it does n't seem to me incredible that some one should be fond of Bill."

Now that her impassivity was broken, she made no attempt to wrap it again around her.

"Then why must you butt in?" she cried. "Why can't you let us alone? I'm of age, Bill's of age, he's not even dependent on you. What business is it of anybody's what we do?"

"I'm a human parent, not a cowbird," Carrington pointed out. "Cowbirds, I am told, never even see their own young——"

"That's better than fluttering after them all their lives long!" In a quieter tone she added: "Oh, well, it's natural. Parents never see their children as genuine grown-up people; no, not if they're ninety. Well, since you

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feel you must do something, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know, till I know the situation. Have you and Bill slipped over to Jersey City to an accommodating justice of the peace?"

"And if we have?"

"Mrs. Carrington will come to call on you. It will be better to keep it quiet till after commencement. Then we'll put it in the papers and give a ball for you."

"Will you like your daughter-in-law being on the stage?"

Carrington laughed. "Does n't matter what I like, does it, so long as Bill likes it?" He added, with a change of tone: "A few years ago, I should have given you a definite answer. I should have said that no marriage had a chance of success if the wife had only a divided allegiance to give her home. But to-day I'm not so sure. Not so sure but a happy vacation together might generate more devotion than the daily round." He broke off. "Well, we'll leave all that to you and Bill to work out."

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"You're rather decent," she said, on an unwilling note. "Yes, you are decent. And I'll put you out of your misery. Bill and I are not married. Nor going to be."

"And whose fault is that?"

"You do n't suppose I'd let it be Bill's?"

"Then why do you let it be yours?"

"Because I do n't want to marry. I do n't want to marry, ever. I want to go on as I am. I've got my own home that I pay for myself. I'm getting on. I'm getting on well. I want to go my own road."

"Does Bill oppose your career?"

"Oh, yes," she sighed, as one who had been over this many weary times. "Well, I suppose I could fight it out. I could make him yield. But after he'd given me my own way, he'd hate me. He'd wish he'd never married me."

"Would he? Would it be impossible, not merely to conquer Bill, but to convert him?"

"So that he'd be perfectly satisfied to have his wife 'prancing around for all Broadway to stare at'? He says he'll never share his wife

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with the first-nighters. Perhaps he's right. Perhaps no real man would. I do n't ask him to try it."

"This other thing," Carrington began gently, "this thing you are trying——"

She met his gaze squarely. "I call it a great deal more respectable than marrying him in the full expectation of unmarrying him after a while."

"Perhaps it is. But the world does n't call it so. This may be a benighted world, according to your view, but it's the world you have to live in——"

"Are n't you forgetting," she interrupted sharply, "that I am on the stage? What you're saying applies to a *débutante*. They must n't be talked about, or nobody'll want to marry them. But it does n't do *me* any harm to be talked about."

"I'm not speaking to the dancer. I'm speaking to the country doctor's daughter. Would your father have liked this affair you and Bill have drifted into?"

A sudden mist veiled her defiant eyes.

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"Dad would have told me to work it out for myself the best way I could."

"That's all I ask you."

"Are you asking me—after what your friend's told you—you *sound* as if you were *asking* me to marry Bill."

"My child, I think I am."

"I suppose you think he owes me that—reparation?"

"I think you owe it to each other."

After a silence, while she scrutinized him with her direct gaze of a child, she said for the second time, "You *are* pretty decent."

"I'm forty-nine, and to you I might as well be a hundred and forty-nine. But fossil as I am, I do understand about you and Bill. You feel you've got to have each other. But this hidden relationship—it won't last. It can't."

"Well, then?" she challenged.

"Well, then, why bother about it? Why not keep my hands off and let Bill's passion burn itself out? That what you mean?"

"Yes. In the end, you know, he'll come

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back to the fold and marry a really nice girl."

"Probably. And then when the niceness grows a little monotonous, he'll begin to think of forbidden fruit. He'll think of it all the more readily because he knows the way to where it grows. However, I'm not really concerned about that hypothetical nice girl. I'm concerned about this one."

She would n't soften to his smile. Her expression conveyed that she was quite capable of looking out for herself.

"Bill, we'll say," Carrington went on, "comes back to his nice girl. What do you go back to?"

"My work."

"Your work has n't kept you from wanting something else, too. If you want it now, what's to make you stop wanting it?"

She flashed to her feet.

"You think my life's going to be one long procession of Bills?"

"Something like that. Aspirants won't be lacking. It's very pleasant to be adored. You'll miss it when Bill goes. You'll hardly

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be able to do without it, unless you stiffen up your moral fiber by deliberately sending him away."

"Perhaps you think I 've already had a procession?"

"No, I do n't, or I should n't be bothering to talk to you. I should be buying off the vulgar harpy."

Carrington, too, had risen, and now made a turn about the room before facing her to add abruptly, "I 've always suspected the real reason why people are so down on a pair like you and Bill is because they wish so much it was themselves. And since it is n't themselves and could n't by any possibility ever be themselves, they stone Bill and Mary. They don't feel that way about marriage. A marriage means sickness and health, servants and tradesmen's bills, cares and responsibilities. We can quite sincerely wish a bridal couple joy; who 'd be mean enough to grudge them all the joy they 're likely to get? But something that 's sheer romance—sheer inclination—we can't bear to see anybody steal that. Now I

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hope I 'm not a dog in the manger. It 's true that for the last quarter-century no one has got excited about me. But I do n't believe that 's the reason I can't bear to see you and Bill happy."

After a moment's silence he went on: "No, the world's instinct is right, when all 's said and done. You and Bill are trying to get something without paying for it. You're licking the sugar coating off and spitting out the pill. Marriage—taking the bitter with the sweet—sharing together, looking out for each other, looking out for the children—you take your solid place as part of the American commonwealth and the scheme of creation. But this hole-and-corner affair—it is n't teaching you 'life', though you probably think so. You 'd learn more of life ordering Bill's dinners. Dinner is normal, it 's every-day, it 's life. This other thing—it 's no more life than your Arabian Night down there is life—all excitement of the senses as they both are."

He broke off with a smile.

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"There's eloquence for you. You see, it's my trade. I'm a lawyer."

She'd been looking at him throughout his speech, at the lank height of him, the long-fingered, bony hands, the long head, rather hatchety, the deep-set gray eyes. He felt that she was weighing him rather than his words. She spoke abruptly: "You said I wasn't a vulgar harpy. Well, you're not a heavy father."

At her intense tone, Carrington burst into a laugh.

"I've been looking for you for four days," she went on. "I knew that man would run straight to you. And I was furious. I tried not to behave as I do in the piece, when I order the Emir's Son's head cut off. But—well, you saw I was furious. Not now. You're—you're human."

"I hope I'm not the heavy father. It never seemed to me it would be any fun to drive one's only child out into the storm. Or to quarrel with him and insult him, as a preliminary to giving in in the end. However,

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in this case, it is n't expediency moves me—making the best of a bad job. I don't see why this should n't turn out a good job. I think you've done wrong, you know. But not such a mean wrong as if you'd married Bill, to play safe, never intending to stick it. Now, if you make up your mind to marry him, I am sure you will stick it. You'll manage to arrange your lives, find some sort of compromise——”

“Oh, compromise!”

“Yes. If order is heaven's first law, compromise is this world's. You'll reach your *modus vivendi*. Or else, if you can't, you'll end—this other thing. It's a quagmire, my child. You've got to pull yourself out.”

She stood looking at him gravely, as if unconscious of how gravely or how long. He broke the stillness.

“I'm going now. Think about it. And about that father of yours. It will come out all right.”

Still without speaking, she moved beside him toward the door. On the threshold he of-

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ferred his hand, saying conversationally:
"Mary Lea is a wonderful name for an electric sign: they can read it on Staten Island. Of course your name is really Guendolen?"

At this she laughed out—the first time he had heard her laugh.

"No. My name is really Mary."

"I 'm glad. Good-by, Mary."

CHAPTER II

ON a clear, still Sunday morning, intensely cold, Miss Mary Lea walked briskly down her street to Riverside Drive. Buried in brown fur coat and toque and muff, her face was hidden close as a harem lady's in swathes of brown veil. At the corner of the Drive a high-powered roadster waited. Its guardian, stamping up and down the sidewalk, seemed inclined at sight of her to emulate the manners of the bear whose skin he wore. But remembering the church-going public, he merely offered a crushing hand-clench and a cheerful, "Well, at last, Angel!"

"Let's go up the river and have lunch at Millbrook," she suggested, as the motor turned over.

"We're going to the farm. Those warm days cleared all the snow out. Now the roads are like iron."

"They'll be just as good up the river."

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"What's the matter with the farm?" Through her veil and his own goggles he tried to read her eyes.

"I do n't like it any more. Not since other people have been there and spoiled it."

"They'll not be there to-day."

"No, it's all spoiled. It is n't our place any more."

"Well, wherever you like, hon. If you feel that way about the farm—But they did n't suspect a thing. I told you that then, and I tell you again now. They thought we were Vail and his sister, just as we said."

"Perhaps *she* did. But Mr. Fordyce—All the time I was helping her, he was looking at me, looking. And at breakfast, when he tried to draw you out about football——"

"I did n't rise."

"No. But no human being could have known so little about the game as you pretended to."

"Well, all the same, he did n't recognize us. I'll prove it to you, out of your own mouth. You said he'd go straight to the Gov-

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ernor. Said you were a regular wiz at reading human nature. You knew he knew us, and you knew he was just the kind to run to Dad. You'd stake your reputation as a Sherlock on that. Well, I did n't believe it, but after I got back to New Haven I began to fidget about it. If there is any going to Dad on the program, I'll be a head-liner myself. So I gave him three days—if he meant to do it at all, he'd get round to it in that time—and Thursday night I ran down home to dinner."

"Thursday!" she exclaimed.

The sharpness of her tone he read as reproach.

"Did n't reach the Grand Central till six forty-five, Angel. I really am bending over my books."

"You might have run up for a minute in the morning."

"Did n't want to. Who are you that I should cut chapel for you?" One hand slipped rapidly from the wheel, into her muff and back again to its post. "Well, it's your

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own fault, girl. You ordered me to take honors."

"Did you see him?"

"Of course. They were dining at home, by themselves. I found that out before I decided to breeze down. Well, all was serene as a day in June."

"You thought he could n't have heard——"

"I know he had n't. If I'd had the slightest doubt I'd have got in my story. Because that brother and sister yarn was a mistake. I meant all right: it was the first thing that popped into my head to shield you. I figured that if I told the old blighter the simple truth that we'd never before stayed there after dark in all our virtuous young lives, that we'd got trapped by the sudden storm same as he, that we were going to return you next day right side up with care, just as innocent and good as we got you, I knew he would n't believe it. Nobody ever does believe a statement of that sort. They make a point of not believing it, just to show they were n't born yesterday. It seemed simpler to say brother and sister. But

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of course, if he had spotted that for a lie, the situation would look that much the fishier."

This long speech he got out, by jerks, to the steering wheel he bent over. It was hard, in the bitter cold, to find breath for it all.

"Thursday!" she murmured, and smiled.

"What?"

"I mean—if he had n't heard by Thursday, probably he won't hear at all."

"Of course he won't. Unless I tell him, myself."

No answer. Presently he added, "You know I will tell him any day you let me."

"Tell him what?"

"That we're engaged. Or, better, that we're married."

"We're not engaged."

"Oh, yes, we are! Don't you think for a minute we're not. We are."

Again no answer. In silence they slipped past Isham Park, over the bridge, through Riverdale, and into Yonkers. But when they had left city streets behind and were skimming

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the Albany postroad, Mary opened her mouth with an abrupt little laugh.

"That was the first thing she said to me that morning, 'Oh, Mary, you 're married?' "

"Hope you had the decency to tell her yes."

She laughed again. "I did toy with the idea. Because Myrtle's New England notions—I'm rather afraid of her. And she was dropping tears of joy all over me. It was rather hard to dash her. But——"

"Well, what did you say?"

"I told her the truth—just how it was. To believe it or not, as she pleased." Her voice softened. "And she did believe me. Myrt's fond of me."

"She wants us to marry."

"Of course she does. She's so romantic. All old maids are, except the spiteful ones. And Myrtle has n't a spiteful thread in her."

"She just worships you. I should think her wishes might have some weight with you——"

"When yours have n't, Billy?" she mocked at him.

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"Mary, why did n't you marry me that morning, before ever you had to face Myrtle?"

"I would n't be scared into it, just because I 'd gone and compromised myself——"

"Now, now," he admonished her. "What 's the sense in that? Did n't I ask you to marry me the first time I ever met you?"

"Yes—idiot."

"And about every time since? Well, then, if you 'd gone to the City Hall with me, the way I wanted you to, last Monday morning, it would n't have been because of anything that happened at the farm. It would have been because you wanted to——"

"But I do n't, Bill."

"You do! You 're as full of this New Woman business as a colt of oats——"

"Well, I am. I did n't have a cent four years ago, or a friend to start me. And now I 'm a star on Broadway. I own I 'm pleased with it."

"So am I. That is, I 'm proud of your pluck and your success. You 've done it by

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hard work, all alone. Not one girl in a thousand could."

"Well, then, don't you see——"

"You 've shown what you can do. But now you do n't have to do it. You 've got me to look out for you."

"But I do n't want to be looked out for. Oh, Bill, can't you see! Money, position, all provided by the management! What is there in it for me?"

He turned to smile at her.

"I 'm in it."

"Will you let me go on with my work?"

"There are lots of things you can do. These charity performances. All the nicest people have gone crazy about dancing. Next winter you could run every amateur show in New York."

Her laugh was half a wail. "Oh, why do I come out with you? Why do I ever see you? We just talk round and round in circles. I ought simply to end it—end it. But I keep hoping—oh, why can't we be just good

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friends? Not want to marry or anything—just be good friends, as we are?”

“We can’t,” he ground between his teeth.
“We can’t.”

“I could.”

“You’re a girl. No, you aren’t either. Not a human girl. You’re a lump of ice.”

“I’m not. I’m awfully fond of you. I want you for my dear friend. But this marrying—— Why can’t you be content to see me every week or so and have a happy friendly time together, and then each of us go back to our work?”

“Because I can’t. You’re talking through your hat, Mary, and you know it.”

“I always wanted a brother——”

“You have n’t found one here. Do n’t talk such rot, Mary Lea. You’re generally honest, at least.”

She gave a long-drawn sigh. “Oh, dear! I ought n’t ever to have let you kiss me. Only, it’s rather difficult not to be kissed by you, Bill. That first time I refused you, I ought to have said ‘Never darken my doors again!’

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But you begged to be allowed to be a friend; you promised to be a friend——”

“I ’d have promised anything, not to be driven away. But it was no deception. You knew perfectly how it was with me.”

“I did n’t! It was so sudden and so silly. How was I to believe you would n’t get over it? I ’d have had to be a good deal more conceited than I am, to believe you would n’t get over it.”

“Every time you ’ve seen me since, you ’ve seen that I have n’t.”

She sighed again. “Well, then, Billy, all we can do, the only thing we can do, is just to end it.”

He turned to blink at her through his goggles, like some huge worried beetle.

“Mary? What d ’you mean?”

“I mean, not try to be friends any more. As you said, it ’s not honest. I—I wish I could care for you the way you want me to. So much, that I should n’t care for anything else. But I don’t. So—let ’s not see each other any more.”

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"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

He was silent, while the needle of the speedometer mounted, mounted. They had the road all to themselves, between the high stone walls of the big estates.

"See that neat little trifle of masonry?" he jerked his head toward it. "If I move my fingers on the wheel, you and I won't have any more troubles in this world. If I thought you meant that, if I thought I never was going to see you again, I tell you flat, my dear, I'd pile us up against that wall. Sorry now you came?"

"No," she said tranquilly. But she held her breath rather till they reached the confines of the wall, and it appeared that the next neighbor preferred a hedge.

"I made my mistake right there at the farm," he went on savagely. "I had you then. Nobody could think me more of a milksop than I think myself."

"You didn't have me!" she blazed. "I don't care what you might have done to me;

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do you think I 'd have married you? Married you after that?"

The car seemed to leap forward. Her hands clinched together in her muff, Mary held it before her face. After an interval, whether one minute or ten, the stream of icy air ceased pouring over her. She lowered the muff to find the car ambling along at some twenty miles an hour.

"I 'm sorry," Bill offered simply. "Sorry I said that to you, Mary. And sorry I let out the engine. But you drive me desperate sometimes."

"I thought you were going to kill us," she answered quietly. "But I 'd have died before I 'd scream for mercy."

Stopping the car, he turned to stare at her unrevealing veil.

"You 're a red Indian, Mary," he said. "You never flinch. Well, I suppose it 's what I like you for."

"What 's the matter?" she asked on his opening the car door.

"I 'm going to see if that gate 's unlocked.

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It's a private way, over to the Millbrook road."

"Let me. I'll be glad to find if I can still move."

The gate proving not fastened, she swung it open.

"This is better," he said, as he tucked her in again. "We're out of the wind. Besides, though there are n't many cars on the post road, a day like this, there are some. There'll be none here. Scared, Miss Mary?"

"No," she laughed.

"Well, I'll drive nicely; I won't freeze you again. Look here. Are you going to marry Schumann?"

"If that is n't like a man! A man always thinks that if a girl is n't crazy for him, she must be crazy for some other man. That she is n't interested in any of his noble sex is something he can't possibly imagine."

"I did n't ask if you were interested in him. I asked if you were going to marry him. He'd let you go on with your great career."

"Oh, surely! That's what he wants me for.

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But if I'm not going to marry for love, I won't for business. You can count on that, Billy."

"You mean that? There's something you won't sacrifice to your career?"

"Yes. Myself."

"Well, then, all right. I'm not going to give up."

"Oh, why do I tell you the truth?" she wailed. "Why don't I pretend I *am* going to marry him? Let you believe I'm the sort of girl who'd jump at marrying him? Then you'd give me up."

"Till I saw you jump, I would n't believe it. No, girl, here I am to stay. But I'll be good. I'll not pester you. I won't mention matrimony, not till you tell me I may. We'll be what you want, just good friends."

"Oh, Billy!" her note was half joy, half misgiving. "Oh, if you would——"

"I will."

"It is n't right," she protested. "I ought to send you away. Because though you say 'friends', you do n't mean it. Oh, yes, I know

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you 'll keep your promise. But it will be because you 're all the time hoping; and there is n't any hope."

"All right, then. You 've warned me. If I do any hoping, it won't be your fault. Meanwhile I promise to be as Platonic as old Plato himself. You can hope, too. You can hope I 'll really get to like being friends."

She laughed away her scruples. "Oh, Bill, do try! You might learn to love it."

He stopped the car, to draw off his gauntlet.

"It 's a bargain. Let 's shake hands on it. I suppose shaking hands is all we 're going to do henceforth?"

She took her hand out of her muff for him. With his left, he removed his great goggles.

"Angel, I have n't seen your face to-day. It 's like talking to a mask. Put your veil up just for a minute."

"I 'll take it off at the inn."

"There 'll be people at the inn."

"Oh! Is this the way you 're Platonic?"

"I will be, I swear. This is just to say

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good-by. Oh, Mary, do n't you think you 've been mean enough for one day?"

After a moment's hesitation, with a little choked laugh, she unfastened her collar and loosened the folds of veil beneath. Her breath had frozen the chiffon against her face. "Oh, my skin is coming with it," she cried, lifting the veil.

Meeting, the lips of each were stiff, and cold as ice itself.

They drew away from one another, each face startled.

Bill recovered himself with a laugh.

"If that was n't an iceberg kiss! But this won't be."

Crushing her to him, he kissed her eyes, her forehead, her cheeks, her mouth, till her whole face flamed.

"You 're not such an ice-maiden after all!" he exulted.

CHAPTER III

IN the phrase of the moment, Carrington dubbed his policy watchful waiting, though he admitted presently that the waiting exceeded the watchfulness.

After his meeting with Miss Lea, he had expected Bill to appeal to him. But the boy, when he turned up at home a few days later, was so tranquil under parental eyes, so entirely unselfconscious, that his father said to himself, "She has n't written him, she's waiting to see him." Another fortnight and Bill arrived for his mother's dinner preceding the Glee Club Concert, again so unruffled that Carrington knew he could have no knowledge of his father's knowledge. To her Indian impassivity then, Miss Lea added an Indian reticence.

Observing his son, he could only sigh over the way these children grow up and grow away. But the other day Bill was running

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to his mother for a scratched finger, to his father with every new marble. And now, not a word to let them into the chief preoccupation of his life.

That his mother did not share his confidence was evident. Into her arrangements for the Glee Club dinner crept a hint of other plans.

"I'm so glad the Apgars are back from their year abroad, just in time for Bill's party. They're such sweet girls, Adèle especially. Marion's a dear child, too, but Adèle's my favorite."

"Let's see, she's named for you?"

"Yes, she's my goddaughter. Her name is really Adelaide. They've taken the Burbank place for the summer. I hope when they're next door to us, Bill will see a lot of her."

"Oh, is that it?"

"It's just a hope of mine. Adèle's really the dearest girl. She's more than pretty, she has distinction. In this day, when the girls are such hoydens, she's so refined. Don't you think so, Allen?"

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Carrington searched his memory for a clear picture of Gerry Apgar's elder daughter. Adèle's distinction seemed to have escaped him. But, then, he never paid much attention to the young fry at Bill's parties.

"Is n't she rather ashy-blond?" he brought out.

"I thought you liked blondes," said his blonde wife.

"Oh, I!" Carrington smiled, laying his hand on hers. "But we're talking of that blonde viking, our son."

"She's just the girl I'd like for a daughter."

"Well, it would be a very suitable match. I like Apgar, and his wife seems to have brought up the girls thoroughly well. And they have about as much money as we have. But is n't it rather early to expect Bill to range himself?"

"He's no younger than you when we were engaged."

"They marry later nowadays."

"There's no reason for Bill to wait. I've

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always said I 'd help him, even if you did n't feel that you could. And I know Mr. Apgar will make Adèle an allowance."

"You surprise me, Adelaide. I 'd no idea you were thinking of this. I did n't suppose you 'd want to share Bill with any one."

She sighed. "Oh, it will be a wrench! But if he 's happy——You know, Allen, in these days when all the young people do is dance, going goodness knows where and meeting goodness knows whom——well, if in the course of the summer Bill does become engaged to Adèle, it will be the best thing."

He was touched at the revelation. Adelaide lived in a world very concrete. He knew her opinions on dinner-service, Persian rugs, travel, chauffeurs' manners, floral borders, the thousand details that make up living. But he could not remember ever hearing her offer an opinion about life. He pressed the hand he held.

"Oh, Bill 's a good boy," he said heartily and sincerely. Though Bill were deep in this entanglement, he was a clean boy. Carrington

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ton never doubted the girl's statement that he had meant marriage. If something else had come of it, it was the fault of her own recklessness. "Bill's all right," he repeated stoutly.

"Indeed he is, Allen. He's never done a thing to cause me a day's uneasiness. It's really wonderful how hard he's been studying this winter. His set does n't. But next winter, in Mr. Wilson's office, with those easy hours——Bill's awfully good-looking, Allen, awfully popular." She laughed a little unsteadily. "It's self-sacrificing of me; I do n't wonder you're surprised. But I want Bill to marry early."

He wondered if any suspicion could have reached her; but he feared to plant one, even by the most roundabout question. Her solicitude must be born only of her maternal brooding. It was touching, that vague solicitude, instinct of protection, so unaware of the definite danger. If Bill brought home his dancing-girl, Adelaide was going to suffer. He would have been glad to spare her. "But

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the main thing is, for Bill to be square," he thought aloud.

"I 'm so glad you agree with me, Allen. I feel sure, with Adèle next door——"

At Bill's party, Carrington took pains to seek out Miss Apgar, and, as his grandfather would have put it, engage her in conversation. She was pretty, she was polite, she talked agreeably of what she had seen and done in her year in Europe. But the adjective her host found for her was "pallid." Unjust, he told himself; chits can't be themselves in talking to old fogies. But one chit could. Adèle Apgar was no younger than that Mary girl of Bill's. But that girl had been formed by hard knocks. Whether you liked her personality or not, she was a personality. This one seemed only a paper pattern of a nice girl. But, he again reminded himself, is n't everybody a paper pattern "in society"? If he went to Adèle to demand her designs on his son, he might find a real girl.

Yet, in spite of all he could plead for her, Carrington could n't imagine Bill even per-

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ceiving Adèle when his eyes were full of Mary.

For the next month or so, on the rather rare occasions when the boy spent a night in Sixty-eighth Street, you never could have guessed that he had anything on his mind. He said he was working hard, and his father's discreet inquiries confirmed him. No, you would n't have guessed that he was involved in a passionate love-affair, although, Carrington smiled, something about him did suggest that deeper burnish in the plumage of the dove. Bill was a big fellow, hearty, healthy. He had always been proud of his "fitness," but now he looked almost alarmingly fit, as if, Carrington thought, he might begin any minute to smash the furniture, out of sheer excess of animal energy.

Evidently, the affair was still on. As evidently, proceeding on its old lines. If the two had arrived at a plan of marriage, Bill would have come to him. The girl would have seen to that.

He was disappointed in Mary Lea. She

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had called him "awfully decent," and he really thought he had been. It was because there seemed stuff in her to appeal to, and he believed he was appealing to it. At the end of his lecture she had repeated her "awfully decent." They had parted on a note of real friendliness. He had deliberately not asked any promise, he'd been so confident she would n't let him down. Her environment had proved too much for her. In her stage years she had seen too many irregularities—the old platitude, "familiar with its face——"

What to do now but "let Bill's passion burn itself out"? He would n't approach the girl a second time; what use? As for approaching the boy, the disinheriting bluff, as he had candidly owned to Miss Lea, was all bunk. In the first place, it would mean the enlightenment of Adelaide. In the second, it would do no good. Bill, if he was a pampered only son, was not the weakling to squeal at the prospect of earning his living. Moreover, Carrington did not believe that Miss Lea was after Bill's money, money-maker that she was.

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No, that cock would n't fight. The other possible cock, appeals to Bill's affection, to his duty, his better nature—had that a rosier prospect? Bill was fond of his parents, certainly; of his mother, who petted and spoiled him; of his father, who spoiled him less, and was (Carrington suspected) the more valued for that. He was an affectionate sort of youngster, really a devoted son. But, in this hour, what hold had placid filial affection against the tempest of his first young passion?

He was a supine sort of parent, Carrington supposed. A committee of his fellow-fathers would no doubt pronounce him so. Because his non-interference did not proceed from an easy toleration of the affair, a calm washing his hands of it, with, "These things will happen. Boys will be boys." No, he did not tolerate it. He hated it for both of them, both of them who were worthy of something better. If he seemed to tolerate it, it was out of pure cowardice. He dreaded opening this subject to Bill. The boy would be so sure his father could never have been young, could

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not possibly understand, no matter how kindly, how helpful that father strove to be. "Why," thought Carrington, "if I put my paws on his first love-affair, he 'll hate me all his life." And Bill was all he had. More than anything in the world he wanted to be friends with his boy.

No, there was one thing he wanted more—for Bill to be square.

How if the youngster needed his friendly wisdom? But Bill was twenty-three, a man, involved in a man's affair. He had character, he'd always been upright and clean. Why must the older generation always assume its help so indispensable? Let Bill work this out, for himself and by himself.

Carrington reached this point only to demand uneasily: "Do I really think this? Or is it only what that girl thinks?" and to open up the whole question once more. Daily he counseled great corporations in their intricate affairs, whose mismanagement would shake the credit of nations. But himself he could not counsel.

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One afternoon, hanging on a strap in the subway and pondering, as he did in all unoccupied scraps of time, the whole duty of a father, he became aware of his neighbor strap-hanger diffidently bowing to him. She was middle-aged, unfashionable, spinster written in every line of her prim suit, her prim yet wistful face. A fixture, he thought, of some office he frequented, established there before the era of the high-heeled pony-coated stenographer of the period. Returning her bow with the rather marked courtesy he always paid those whose circumstances could not demand it, he saw by the relief lighting her candid eyes that his response had been tardy. He roused himself, then, to say in his friendly voice, "I 'm sorry I have no seat to offer you."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Carrington," she responded as gratefully as if he had really provided the seat. "But I do n't mind the standing."

"It's the pushing and jostling," he suggested. Where had he heard that New England intonation before?

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"Oh, yes. The rush on and off. It used to terrify me when I first came."

"You've not been a New Yorker long, then."

"Nearly two years now. I only thought to stay two weeks. Then the second week, I met Mary."

Of course! The woman who opened the door! How lucky that compunction for his absent-minded rudeness had moved him to speak to her! He might so easily have dropped back into his revery without ever an inkling who she was.

"Miss Lea is well, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you. She's always well, though she does work like—like a piano-mover."

He laughed. "I'm sure if Miss Lea wanted to move pianos, she'd do it. You said 'met her.' Do you mean for the first time?" (Really abominable, the way he cross-examined these women. But his present victim did not seem to resent it.)

"Yes. She came to board where I was

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staying. It was n't a theatrical boarding-house. She wanted to be quiet and study."

"I see. You two took a liking to each other and decided to set up housekeeping together."

"Yes. At least Mary did. Not but what I took the liking," she smiled her shy smile. "But I had n't the money to stay on here."

"'East is east and west is west,' but the twain have met. Of course I know you're from New England. I'm a Green Mountain boy myself."

"So Bill—so your son said. He told me you were born near Montpelier."

"True, and my name's Ethan Allen, though Mrs. Carrington thinks it's ridiculous and long ago made me drop the Ethan. Now that you know the secret of my name, won't you tell me yours?"

"Sir? Oh, excuse me," she answered naively. "Of course you don't know my name at all. It's Myrtle Dewey."

"That's good Vermont."

"Yes, though I'm from New Hampshire

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—East Mendham. That was how your son happened to speak of it.”

They had reached Forty-second Street where the home-rushing crowd ceded them seats. “And what does East Mendham think of you?” Carrington pursued. “Another sad case of the lure of the city?”

She smiled. For all her simplicity she could take a joke. Knowing his New England, he had rather thought she could.

“Why, I guess they are kind of shocked, Mr. Carrington. But it isn’t as if I had anybody belonging to me. I lived all alone with Father. The last twenty years of his life he was a terrible martyr to rheumatism. (He’d got it as a boy of eighteen, fighting through the Wilderness.) When he left me, in February two years ago, I was pretty well beat out with the nursing. It just seemed to me I could n’t stand the thaws, all alone there, up our lane. It’s lonesome enough in winter, but when the thaw comes you might as well be shipwrecked.”

“I know, perfectly.”

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"So I thought if I could get out just for a little and see something and have something to think about after I came back. The folks could n't understand it. They thought it was downright scandalous, wanting to go traveling so soon after my loss. And anyhow, if I was set to go somewhere, I'd ought to go to Boston. But I'd been to Boston; why, I was there twice when I was a girl! I said to myself I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb; I'd just go and see New York."

"And here it is two years. It turned out just as badly as they feared."

Again her eyes twinkled. "Worse, Mr. Carrington. I've never dared write home that I'm living with an actress——Mercy! what was that he called? I'm real pleased to have met you. It's my station."

"I'm getting off here, too," he rose with her. "I'll see you across the street and take the train downtown."

"Oh, Mr. Carrington!" she faced him in dismay. "Here I've been holding forth

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about East Mendham and carried you clear past your station."

"Why, I had n't any particular station. I rather meant to get off at Columbus Circle and walk home across the park, but I was interested in our talk. Now I'll do it on my way back. I'm not in haste."

As he was lifting his hat to her, she gave him the look with which she had appealed to him at the studio door, frightened, yet eager. Her voice trembled with the sense of her daring.

"It's such a cold day, and I brought you out of your way, and all. If you would care for a cup of tea? You won't have to wait for me to blaze a fire. These gas stoves boil water in two minutes."

"You're very kind," he hesitated. He had admitted his leisure, and he liked Miss Dewey, but——

"Oh, you won't disturb Mary," she followed in part his thought. "Soon as she comes in from her walk, she goes to bed till dinner-time."

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"That was it; I was afraid of intruding on her."

"No, she won't know you're there till I tell her, after. But Mary loves for me to have company; she's always wishing I knew more people. When I brought home a lady from the art lecture last week, she was delighted."

"Why, then, I'll come with pleasure."

His scruple, Carrington told himself, was certainly superfluous, since Miss Lea's intimate friend did not even perceive it. Since she had no hesitation in bringing him in, in "telling Mary after," Mary must have given a friendly account of him. She must have felt as friendly as she seemed. She would n't grudge him her tea. But, since she had let him down, ought n't he to refuse to swallow it?

He did n't refuse, when Miss Dewey set it before him, fresh-made and steaming, in the little dining-room where he had waited before. There was no attempt at the proper afternoon-tea rite. Miss Dewey made the

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tea in the kitchen in an earthenware pot, and set him a cup on the corner of the dining-table.

"Sugar gingerbread, as I live!" he exclaimed. "I do n't know when I 've seen any! We keep a chef now."

"Are you very rich?" she asked him simply.

"Why, that depends on what you call rich. I 'm far from the Morgan class. But I make a good deal more than my father ever did, and he used to be called 'in easy circumstances.'"

"A good deal more than Mary?"

"Why, I daresay. I 've been at work a good many more years than she has. But I do n't earn as much as the stars of her profession, Caruso or Charlie Chaplin."

After serving him, she had brought herself a cup of tea, but she forgot to sit down to it. Hand on the back of her drawn out chair, she went on questioning him. (Well, it was but fair.)

"Your wife, too—she 's well off, is n't she?"

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"Yes, Mrs. Carrington has an income of her own."

"And Bill—and your son," she corrected the familiarity a second time, with a blush at its repetition. "Your son's the only child. I know he has money of his own, and his mother makes him an allowance, too. He'll have it all. It's that as much as anything that puts Mary off."

Ah, thought her visitor, now we're getting at it!

Her point of view, he admitted, completely baffled him. He simply could n't see her in the composition. He thought he knew her sort—hard-working, God-fearing, so upright as to lean over backward; unlearned but not ignorant; innocent but nobody's fool. How had her young friend managed to pull the wool over her eyes? When the dancer disappeared over the week-end, was she always easily satisfied with the explanation of a hospitable girl friend? Yet the wool must have been pulled over; you could n't look in her face, worn and rugged as her New Hamp-

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shire hills, and suppose she would accommodate herself to "this sort of thing." Or was it just possible that the girl had so shrewdly played on her naïve interest in the great world, her thirst for horizons other than her own, as to make her believe that "the crime of Clapham's chaste in Martaban"? That the two-foot rule of East Mendham cannot measure Bohemia, that these experiences are necessary to the development of an artist?

"She does n't like to be thought mercenary?" he accepted the lead given him.

Miss Dewey smiled, and remembered to sit down to her tea.

"She does n't care so much what she's thought. If Mary *was* mercenary, if she wanted the money, I guess she'd take it. But what she really wants is what she can do herself."

"But if she really cares for Bill——"

"She does, Mr. Carrington." The spinster's eyes suffused. "She does. She would n't have him round this way, if she did n't. I don't want you should think she'd take up

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with him if she did n't. No, nor with anybody else. There 's nobody else; there never has been. She does n't think of any man but Bill."

"And yet they 're not—I suppose I 'm to understand from the way you speak—they 're not intending to be married."

Miss Dewey pushed her cup away. "She puts me out of patience."

Carrington felt himself on the verge of enlightenment.

"Then what is the situation?"

"I blame her," said her friend, gravely. "I 'm not saying one word behind her back that I have n't said to her face, more than once. You told her the same. You told her either to get engaged to him, or to let him go."

"And she does n't."

"No. She 'll lose him, Mr. Carrington. He 's a lovely young man, and she 'll lose him if she goes on like this."

The moisture in her eyes seemed beseeching him—him, actually!—to do something

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about it. He observed gently, "Miss Lea knows how to make a friend."

"She said that. She said you acted like a friend."

"I do n't mean myself; I mean you. I'm not an ally. No—and I'm only saying behind her back what I would say to her face—the best I can do for her is to remain neutral."

"I understand," she responded quickly. "I've seen right along that her being an actress—Nobody could have been brought up to think worse of theaters than I did. Of course you city people go all the time, but when it comes to taking an actress home into the family, I guess you feel just the way East Mendham would. I understand perfectly; only I keep forgetting that you do n't know her as I do."

"I do n't feel as East Mendham does," Carington protested. "His mother may, at first. But Bill can bring her round, if he can get his Mary."

"I do n't understand her," Miss Dewey sighed. "Love her as I do, I do n't under-

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stand her. Maybe it 's because she 's Western.

"She—she 's kind of like a man—some men. When I was young I had a friend, he used to take me to prayer-meeting. But he did n't want to stay on the farm; he thought he'd have more chance in the city. He knew I could n't leave Father. I used to think he'd be back some day; he said he would. But he never did. It 's years since we 've heard anything of him."

"You think Miss Lea 's like that?—can't bear to be hampered?"

Her eyes, fixed on her tea-cup, seemed to be looking into the past.

"There was n't a thing I could do; I could n't leave Father. I had to let all that go. But Mary—I always tell her she 's free to choose. There 's nothing holding her back. But the way she 's going, she 'll just end a dried-up old maid like me."

To Carrington's amused reflection there seemed nothing more unlikely.

"She 'll have a very full life, don't you think?" he suggested. "Even if she does n't

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marry, she 'll have her profession, her friends, work, travel, change, countless interests."

"All centered in herself, Mr. Carrington. That do n't make a person happy."

"What does?"

"Doing for somebody. After Father left me—well, I was bound I 'd have a sight of New York. And I did enjoy it. I 've never had any chance to improve myself. I did enjoy the museums and all. But if I had n't found Mary and she had n't needed just such a person as I, why, even if I 'd had the money to stay here a year, I could n't have felt to do it. I 'd have gone back to old Mis' Bailey, the way she wanted me to, and nursed *her* rheumatism."

Carrington laughed. "Miss Lea has n't got the New England conscience. You New England women know no peace unless you 're sacrificing yourselves for somebody. But in California I 'm told there are more days of sunshine in the course of the year. Anyhow, the native temperament is different. Miss Lea, I take it, wants 'to live her own life.'"

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“It’s a mistake. I’m an old maid, and I know.”

Carrington rose. “I’ve enjoyed our talk, and the sugar gingerbread, immensely. Tell Miss Lea—no, do n’t tell her anything. She knows it already.”

“I’ll tell her you were here, Mr. Carrington. And that you do n’t think she’s acting honorable.”

“Tell her I wish it was you Bill was after.”

“The idea!” She flushed and laughed, but he thought she saw the friendliness behind the joke, for she added: “Mr. Carrington, I know how busy you are. But if you ever take your walk this way, I’d be real pleased to see you again. And so would Mary.”

“Do you bake your own bread?”

“Why, I would n’t feed Mary *baker’s* bread!”

“Then perhaps some day you’ll make election cake. I have n’t tasted it since I was a boy.”

CHAPTER IV

AFTERWARD Carrington wondered at his ready promise to go and eat election cake. He had taken to Miss Dewey; she amused and touched him. Reminded him, though he supposed she was younger than he was, of the maiden aunts who used to make his special goodies for him when he was a boy. Yes, if she had lived in any flat in New York but the particular one she did live in, he would have gone to tea with alacrity; he whom his wife could not drag to anybody's "afternoon." But a visit to this flat, though ostensibly to Miss Dewey,—though, he corrected himself, actually to Miss Dewey——Well, his first unpremeditated descent was a mere reconnaissance, a foray into the enemy's territory. But a second visit, an arranged visit, could only be construed as acceptance of "this sort of thing." Luckily, he had not pledged himself to a certain day, had merely

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agreed to ring up "some time" to give twenty-four hours' warning of his appetite for cake. Perfectly simple and usual, to let "some time" slip along to "no time."

Resolved to avoid the girl, Carrington again fell to considering "having it out with Bill." But always the silent debates ended as his natural bias inclined. He loathed the rôle of heavy father. No argument presented sufficient merit to constrain him to it.

Sixty-eighth Street was seeing less and less of Bill. His mother, planning for the summer, seemed content with his plea of work, but his father could not believe he spent all his Sundays in company with the classics.

One late March day, Carrington had a conference in Yonkers. He motored up by Seventh Avenue, but when they crossed Spuyten Duyvil Bridge on the way back, his chauffeur swung over westward and up Washington Heights. It was a beautiful day, the first earnest of spring in a backward season. Through the open windows of the limousine the air blew fresh and sweet, smelling of growth; the

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first thin foliage of the Riverside Park showed vividly green against blue water. Carrington leaned back comfortably, thinking that he was thinking of the problems of reincorporating the manufacturing concern he had just left, really thinking of nothing at all. Till suddenly Grant's Tomb loomed up in front of him.

He had n't expected Terry to take him this way, it had n't occurred to him that he was going to pass within a block or so of Miss Dewey's flat. As he had not telephoned, no doubt of her being out at an art lecture or some other clinic for cultural improvement. But he'd leave a card, he owed her polite amends for his neglect. Stopping the motor and sending it on home, he walked briskly down the side street. As he asked in the hallway for Miss Dewey, he was already taking out a card to pencil a regretful message. But Miss Dewey, it appeared, was at home. In another moment she was welcoming him into her door, assuring him, eager in her pleasure, that there was election cake.

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"I 've been making it every week, in case. Oh, no, it has n't been wasted. Mary likes it real well. She can only have the simplest things, you know."

He followed her into the tiny dining-room, where now instead of the fern on the table was a broad pot of lilies of the valley. He felt causelessly happy, like a boy playing hooky.

"And is Miss Lea very conscientious about her diet?" he asked her friend moving back and forth between the table and the kitchenette.

"Dancers have to be," she informed him gravely. "Maybe you think—I used to—it's about the most frivolous existence? Well, for the chorus girls I presume it is. When they're on Broadway, anyhow. Maybe they feel they have to make up for all the time they're on the road, or 'resting,' poor things. Of course Mary was a chorus girl, once. But she's different."

"She did n't mean to stay one," he quoted,

"It's so many hours to sleep at night; so long to rest in the daytime; so much exercise;

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so much time outdoors; just such and such things to eat. Why, I tell her it's like a penitentiary, Mr. Carrington."

"To which she's sentenced herself, like my friend Osborne."

"Only she does n't get out in a week," Miss Dewey showed that she read the newspapers. "It's to go on and on as long as she lives, she expects."

"We business people," he conceded, "are too apt to think of an artist's existence as made up of equal parts of frivolity and inspiration. It is n't true. There's so much talent lying round in the world, and so little achievement—no end of clever chaps, clever women, too, and none of them get anywhere. No, to succeed, you've got to have iron in you."

He was thinking aloud, rather than speaking to her, and now he sat silent, thinking.

"Anything doing?" he roused himself to ask. "Bill still devoted?"

"Oh, yes. But whether he makes any progress—I guess they quarrel a good deal. Sometimes I think if he'd stay away a while.

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But he 's jealous. Of Schumann. Of everybody at the theater."

"Is Schumann an aspirant?"

"He wants to marry her. As an investment, Mary says. But you need n't be afraid of that, Mr. Carrington."

At his quizzical look she flushed and laughed, but stood her ground.

"I declare, there I go again talking as if you felt as I do! I guess the reason I do it, I 'm just as confident as I sit here that if you could know her the way I do, you 'd love her the way I do. Why, Bill says, himself——We did n't either of us tell him about your call, Mr. Carrington. Mary understood you did n't wish it. But Bill always says, 'I count on the Governor.'——That 's Mary."

"That" was a click of the Yale lock, a shutting of a door, a clear, liquid whistle; what was the tune? Why, "Polly put the kettle on, we 'll all have——" The pucker was spoiled in the middle of a note, as Miss Lea looked into the dining-room.

She was glad to see him. In the first second

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of meeting her eyes, he knew that. But she was startled, too, hesitant, without a trace of the other day's hard self-possession. He went forward, hand outstretched, saying a trifle breathlessly the first thing that came into his head.

"Is this Miss Mary Lea? I should have recognized you descending from a palanquin, or uncoiling yourself from a roll of rugs just set down off the shoulders of your Nubian slaves. But I do n't know you in a tailor-made."

She laughed, she, too, a little tremulous.

"You think I always go round in some outlandish——Of course, after the other day. Oh, I should n't have done that!"

"Have shaken hands with me, Mary Lea?"

"No. Because I have n't done what you asked."

Miss Dewey came in from the kitchenette, with a fresh cup of tea and lemon. Herself and Carrington had taken cream.

"Cream fattening?" he inquired of Myrtle.

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"Oh, dear, yes. She never takes a drop of it."

"I never take much of anything that I like. But the tea looks good. I'm so warm, and so thirsty."

She did n't look warm, with her camellia skin that never reddened. Putting aside her coat and hat, she was revealed in a severe white linen shirt, its riding-stock covering her to the chin. Her hair to-day was not braided but wrapped like a bandage round and round her skull. Carrington had made fun of this fashion. "Well, it *is* absurd," he told himself now. "It *is* ugly. But it somehow suits her little chiseled head."

"Got everything you want, Mary?" Miss Dewey asked. "Because if Mr. Carrington will excuse me, I'll go and put the vegetables over."

"But I do n't excuse you," Carrington protested. "This is a call on you. I did n't come to see this young person."

She smiled at him, closing the kitchen door

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behind her. Mary set down her tea-cup, to lay her two hands palm up on the table.

"I have n't broken off, Mr. Carrington. Oh, I was going to. I tried——How I despise people that tell me they 'tried'! I guess mine was n't much of a try. I 'm still seeing him."

"And still—obdurate?"

"Yes—if you mean I won't marry him. I 'm honest with *him*, at least. I 've told him over and over again that I 'll never marry him. If he still hopes, it 's his own risk."

"He still hopes, then."

She threw back her head with a little defiant motion.

"He does me that honor."

"Well, Mary girl, why do n't you take him, for better, for worse?"

The defiance dropped from her as she studied him gravely.

"You 've had two months to think about it and you still say that?"

"Yes. Life would be so interesting with you in the family."

"I saw your wife the other day," she re-

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sponded unexpectedly. "Oh, no, she does n't know. I danced for charity and she came up and thanked me, so graciously and kindly."

"Mary, if it's on her account——Well, she's more conventional than I. She might n't jump for joy quite as promptly as Bill counts that I shall. But she is too fond of him not to accept whatever makes him happy, and, the surprise over, to be happy herself. If it's on her account you hold back——"

"It's not. Not in the way you mean. I'm not sacrificing myself for her. But——well, I'm a play-actor and actors have to have imagination, have to project themselves into their rôles. The rôle I can't project myself into is her daughter-in-law. I know it, just as well as if Schumann handed me a part I could n't touch."

"You're not going to marry Mrs. Carrington."

"Bill's just like her," she flashed back. "You're not. You accept your social position because it's there, but you never think about it. To you it's interesting that I began in the

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chorus; if I were a member of the family you 'd just as lief tell callers all about it. But Bill would n't. He 'd be trying to hush it up, hush up my whole stage career, mold me into the sort of elegant creature Mrs. William Bartlett Carrington ought to be. Billy has happened to fall awfully in love with me, but he does n't in the least like the kind of person I am."

"If he 's so awfully in love, why can't you do the molding?"

"You can't change a person's character. No, we 're too different. We could never be happy, married; I see that just as certainly as if I were forty Mahatmas gazing into forty ink-pools."

She sat glowering down at the table-cloth, as if she were trying divination. Presently she went on in a low tone.

"I 'm fond of Bill; I really love him. He 's so clean and outdoorsy, and I see so much of men that are n't either. Yes, I care a great deal for him——"

"But you care for your ambition more."

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"It is n't my ambition. It's myself."

"Your ambition *is* you. Yes, I believe that's the truth."

"My name in the electric lights—you think it's that I want. It is n't. I could give that up; I could have just as much of a career knitting tidies. Only I'd want to be let alone to knit 'em. I would n't want to be told they were silly old tidies and it did n't matter a bit whether I finished one or not. Bill thinks everything I've done is just a stop-gap, to fill in the time somehow till I met him."

"I suppose every woman of talent has to face this dilemma."

She looked up sharply, spoke sharply. "It's no dilemma to me. There's only one thing to do. To end it."

"But you don't end it."

Her defiance collapsed. "I know. I see the right and still the wrong pursue. (Father brought me up on the old-fashioned poets). Well, we're going on the road the middle of May."

He smiled almost against his will.

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"You're very specious. I hate drifting, but I've drifted. There's something to be said for your plan, on the ground of expediency. I have a vision of Bill very large and angry, battering down doors. Will you promise to break off absolutely before you go?"

"Yes, absolutely. No if or but. It's a promise."

She was standing before him, holding out her hand. He rose, giving his to a clinch like a school-boy's.

"I think," he said, "after he graduates, Bill deserves a trip abroad."

"I may be away a year, if the show goes as big as it has here. It'll be ancient history long before I'm back."

As if his finding himself on his feet constrained his going, Carrington turned in an automatic sort of way to pick up his hat. Neither of them said a word for good-by. But as he was walking out, "I do like you!" she breathed.

He sent Miss Dewey a box of roses, because he had been her guest and had left without

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remembering her existence, but he went no more to eat election cake. Instead, he went several times to "Morgiana." The piece was after Bakst and Reinhardt, in most respects a long way after. The author, the manager, the scene painter, the costumer, conspiring to profit by the wave of Orientalism surging out of Russia, had contrived, deliberately or because they could n't help it, to coarsen everything they touched. Where the imported Arabian Nights play had flaunted a sort of innocent heartlessness, the heartlessness of the child or the savage, the American imitation showed a sophisticated brutality. The dramatic personæ of the model knew no moral standards; the imitations knew them familiarly, to wink at them. The sensuousness of the one was open and unashamed; the sensuality of the other furtive yet brazen. The trail of vulgarity was over it all; and yet *Morgiana's* twinkling tiptoes seemed to carry her like wings, fluttering over, never in, the smear.

Carrington wondered whether it was because he had with him the vision of her as she

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was off stage that she seemed to him to have escaped the stain. But no, looking back, he knew that the first time he had seen her dance he had felt her quality; only he had not dared believe in it.

One night he took Mrs. Carrington with him to the theater, on their way to the Hydes' musicale. She had seen the piece before and pronounced it a vulgar thing, but yielded to his plea that he needed an hour's relaxation of the genuine tired-business-man variety, to fit him to endure the dissonances of Strauss and Schönberg. Her real reason for accompanying him was that she wanted to discuss with him, or rather to inform him of, her plans for opening the Long Island house, more fully than she had cared to do before the butler at dinner. Though he always left such arrangements entirely to her, never suggesting an emendation or being expected to do so, yet she loved "consulting" him. All the details of her careful management were so interesting to her that it was one of her greatest pleasures to expound them, point by point. Carrington,

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realizing this, was always a polite listener. Not until they had left the play in the middle of the second act, did he find a chance to say to her, "That little *première danseuse*—she's rather wonderful, do n't you think? Like a breath of clean frosty air."

"She danced for our fête," Mrs. Carrington answered. "Kate Dalton engineered it; I was n't present at the meeting, or I should have voted against it. The ballet was entirely our League girls, and I, for one, had I had a daughter there, should n't have liked her brought in contact—I did n't see any necessity for a professional, anyhow. Since they're taking up the dancing fad, lots of the girls are every bit as good—better, in fact. Adèle Apgar would have done the thing beautifully. And with such exquisite refinement."

"How did it go off? You know I could n't manage to get there." (He did not add, that if the fact of Miss Lea's participation had penetrated to his consciousness, he would have found an inconspicuous seat by the door.)

"Oh, very well. I must own, much better

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than I feared. She took her tone from her surroundings; they're all more or less chameleons, I suppose, or they could n't act different parts."

"And how did the girls stand the contact?"

"Oh, they drank her in, of course. That's what distressed me. They're so dancing-mad, of course they buzzed around her. But I do n't think any harm came of it. She never hung about after rehearsals, or made up to any of them. The Lafittes had such an unfortunate experience. They let Maisie take lessons from a girl at the Folly, who introduced the child to all sorts of undesirable people and took her to horrible places. The Lafittes had to bundle her off abroad. But with Miss Lea, her check seemed to be the only part of it that interested her."

"I fancy you're right, there," Carrington's amusement answered indiscreetly. But his Adelaide was not observant, her own thoughts always occupying her to the exclusion of curiosity about those of anybody else.

"Business and social relations do n't mix,"

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she pronounced. "I respected Miss Lea for not trying to mix them. She's well-mannered for a person of that class."

"Of what class?" Carrington wanted to know. "Of the class that earns its living? It's hardly a caste apart. It is even possible that Miss Lea was born in our own class."

Mrs. Carrington was not interested to follow this speculation.

"It turned out very well," she summed up. "Is this our street? They have got a crush."

But Carrington, as their motor took its place in the slow-moving line, had yet one more question about the fête.

"Was Bill present?"

"No. He said he dare n't cut any classes that week. Why?"

"I wondered what impression Adèle's dancing had made on him."

"I wish he had been there. To appreciate the difference. Between a *lady* dancing and that—that circus-performer proficiency."

Carrington could n't keep a shake out of his voice.

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"Was it marked?"

"Oh, very marked indeed."

The spring went by, Bill, it was understood, very busy working for honors. Mrs. Carington, who saw him oftener than his father did, reported that he was working too hard; he looked worried; his nerves were on edge. She hoped he'd take a good rest at Southampton before he reported to Mr. Wilson.

Then one day in June, Bill came to his father at the office. In his first glance Carington told himself the boy's mother was right; his exuberance had been quenched; he did look worried. Yes, and hangdog.

"Feeling the mental pace a bit, Bill?" Carington suggested.

Bill laughed, a shade constrainedly. "Well, I have been grinding, Governor. Should n't find it such a strain, I suppose, if I'd strained a little harder in my other years. But doing it all in one spurt——"

"Going to get your *cum laude*?"

"Think so, sir."

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"Good boy!"

Bill threw one knee over the end of his father's desk.

"Dad! You were speaking to me a while ago about my taking a holiday?"

"I 'm not forcing it on you, son. After all, as you yourself said, you 've had a good deal of holiday, all through Yale."

Bill's fresh skin flushed a little.

"That 's true, sir. That 's what I felt when I told you I 'd rather begin right away in Mr. Wilson's office. I said I wanted to start in the day after commencement."

"You were pretty emphatic about it. I 've told Mr. Wilson he may expect you."

Bill shifted on his perch.

"Well, that 's what I came in to talk to you about, Governor. It 's been infernally hot at New Haven, and the 'mental pace'—well, I haven't the mental equipment the old man has, you know," he smiled. "And mother 's after me hard to take a holiday——"

"The breezes at Southampton begin to lure you."

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"No, I do n't want to loaf around at Gray Shingles. But what you proposed—a trip abroad——"

"You 've faced about?"

"Yes," Bill appeared to swallow a lump. "Yes, I have. If you think it does n't make any odds to Mr. Wilson—and I do n't see how it can, there 's nothing doing on the Exchange—why, Charlie Edson 's going to take a walking-trip through Germany——"

Carrington sat tapping his pencil on the blotting-pad.

"I think you 've earned a holiday," he said. "But about 'abroad'——Your mother 's set her heart on having you to fuss over at Southampton."

"Oh, I 'm fed up on Southampton." Bill made a pettish movement that sent a pile of letters to the floor. "I 'll go straight into the office rather than that."

Carrington rose.

"Well, I 'm off for Chicago at five o'clock. Come down Sunday. We 'll decide it then."

If Bill saw nothing surprising in the trip

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to Chicago, not so the office force. The chief's calendar was crowded with appointments for the next two days, there was much hasty telephoning and explaining and rearranging to be done. The office wondered what was up and decided that the Consolidated Traction must have begged for quarter at last.

But Carrington's client was the most surprised of all. When the telephone rang, in Miss Lea's rooms in the Milwaukee hotel, and a voice asked, "Do you know who this is speaking?" her voice answered, "I can't believe I do. But I know whom it sounds like."

The voice at the other end of the wire warmed at the recognition.

"Your ears do not deceive you. Can you come for an hour's drive with me? You shall be back in time for your rest."

"When shall I be ready?"

"In five minutes?"

"In one, if you like."

"Good enough! I'll send a car for you."

After absorbing Miss Lea into its comfortable interior, the limousine ran down to the

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Northwestern station where Carrington emerged from the waiting-room.

"This is luck," he said, "to catch you in an idle hour."

"I was just starting for my walk when the 'phone rang."

"We'll get out in the park and walk, if you like. Do the penitentiary rules, as Miss Dewey calls them, still bind on the road?"

"Oh, even more. You have to be so careful; the road bristles with pitfalls of colds and indigestions."

He scanned her closely, finding her clear-eyed, clear-skinned as always, and reposeful, her hands loose in her lap, not fiddling with her wrist-bag or her ruffles.

"You *look* very well," he said. "In your creed, does exercise exorcise *all* ills?"

"Well," her smile understood his implication, "one is n't very hospitable to the mulley-grubs when one's circulation is working."

"You pagan!"

She broke the pause.

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"Fancy your turning up in Milwaukee! Is the beer trust going to be indicted?"

"I did n't turn up. I came to see you."

As she glanced quickly at him, her calm showed its first ripple.

"Bill was talking to me yesterday. He wants to go abroad."

"Did n't you expect that?" She was all self-possession once more.

"I proposed it to him a month or more ago. He would n't hear a word. He had no patience with holidays; he wanted to begin earning his living. But now, he's keen to go."

She frowned, a little puzzled.

"Do n't you want him to?"

"Why, yes. If it's all right."

"I've kept the compact exactly. I said I'd break with him before I ended my season. I have. He understands it." She sighed. "I was pretty brutal. He understands that it's absolutely finished."

He put his hand over hers.

"But—is it all right?"

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"Why, yes. Everything you said was true. It had to end. If I flinched, just now, it was n't because I 'm sorry. It was over the recollection of some scenes we had. But they're over. It's all right."

"My dear, if you are n't happy——"

"But I am," she smiled. "You know what a good circulation I've got." Then, as he still scanned her in a troubled silence, she added more gravely: "I am happy, because I've done the right thing at last. It was n't square to Bill to let him dangle around."

"It was n't square to yourself. But in the name of reason, Mary, if you really care for him——"

"I do. But not enough."

"Not enough to give up——"

"I've no interest in Bill's world, and he has no interest in mine. He thinks my acting is a delightful accomplishment; he does n't concede, he never could, that my work is as much to me as any man's could be to him."

"There are many instances of actresses suc-

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cessfully married outside their profession. They work out a *modus vivendi*——”

“We ’ve been over all this before. It comes back to this: I do n’t love him enough.”

“You absolutely refuse to make an honest man of Bill?”

Though the form of the words was a jest, she took them up quickly and seriously.

“Bill’s hands are clean; do n’t you worry about Bill’s part in it.”

“I have worried about it.”

“I know you have. I know that’s what brought you out here. Now you can go back and say to him, ‘Depart in peace.’”

“You mean that?”

She wrinkled up her face at him.

“For the last time of asking, I do mean it.”

With his free hand, Carrington took out his watch.

“Then I ’ll go back by the four-forty, if I can make it. Shall I set you down here for your walk?”

The phrase sounded a dismissal. But his hand was still over hers.

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"If you do n't mind," she said, "I 'll drive with you to the station."

The car turned, increasing its speed.

"You could n't stay to dinner?" Mary suggested. "Myrtle would love to see you."

"I think I 'd better not. I left the office all in a tangle."

She did not urge it. The rest of the way they drove in silence, still hand in hand.

As the car slowed before the entrance, he opened the door.

"I 'll have to run for it." With a quick pressure of her fingers, he was gone.

CHAPTER V

ONE afternoon toward the end of summer, Carrington was met at the door of Gray Shingles with a message asking him to go up at once to his wife's sitting-room. He found that pleasant chintz-hung apartment darkened, and perfumed not by bowls of roses but by the pungent odor of smelling-salts.

He recognized the symptoms of what he called a strategic headache. In purely physical afflictions Mrs. Carrington deprecated his presence. Only when her suffering sprang from outrages of the servants, or dislocations of the social calendar, was he accustomed to be summoned into council. Expressing a proper sympathy, he waited for her to disclose her mind.

"Yes, my head's splitting, but that's no matter. I sent for you because——Close the door, Allen. I've just heard the most awful thing."

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"Bill?" his father exclaimed.

She sat up in her chaise longue, gold-encrusted bottle in one hand, a crumpled handkerchief in the other.

"Allen! Then you've heard and you haven't told me! Then it's true!"

"I *don't* know what you're talking about. When I find you prostrated by some vague but 'awful thing,' naturally my first thought's of the boy."

"Allen! What have *you* heard about Bill?"

"Nothing, beyond what was in his last letter—that he and Charlie were well and having the time of their lives."

She scanned his face in the gloom, as if to test his candor.

"Allen! You really have n't heard what they say? The clubs always get the scandal first. I thought you were shielding me. Oh, do be open! Tell me everything."

Carrington began to tread warily.

"Scandal? Concerning Bill? Nobody's had the cheek to try that on me. Why, my dear girl," he reproached his wife, sniffing

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into her handkerchief, "how silly to work yourself up over a piece of malicious gossip! Dismiss it, on your knowledge of Bill's character."

"You have heard something," she insisted. "You do n't ask me what it is."

"But I do ask you, if you'll give me a chance. What is this 'awful thing'?"

"Why, they say he is n't with Charlie at all. They say he—he's got an actress——"

Carrington's gesture dramatized incredulous impatience.

"And do they—whoever 'they' may be—particularize what actress?"

"It is n't an actress, really. It's a dancing-girl. You remember, we went once to see her—that Mary Lea."

Carrington, though he believed his face was schooled, was thankful for the closed shutters.

"Who is your informant? Has some one seen them together?"

"Well, no. At least, I do n't know. It was

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Sally McAlpin. She came to see me. They were in San Francisco last month——”

“But how could Bill have been in San Francisco last month? Unless you think he sends post-cards over to Charlie to be mailed in the Black Forest?”

“Do n’t joke about it, Allen. Unless you think—plenty of men do—that these disgraceful affairs are jokes.”

“When I ’m convinced that a disgraceful affair exists, I ’ll be serious enough, Adelaide. At present the charge seems to me hazy. Perhaps you ’ll explain what it is Mrs. McAlpin said that seems to have had more weight with you than your knowledge of your son?”

“She said ‘Morgiana’ was being played in San Francisco and they went. It was announced as the original New York company, and it was. All except the *Morgiana*, who was a perfect stick. At supper everybody was wondering why Mary Lea had left, and where she was. They all thought it was queer. Well, the McAlpins came back East next day, and Sally happened to mention this to somebody;

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she says she does n't know how she came to speak of it, she had n't a suspicion. But it seems everybody knows Bill was infatuated with her all last winter. When we thought he was working so hard at college."

"He was working hard, or he would n't have stood on graduation where he did. If it's true that he admired Miss Lea, he seems to have kept the sentiment within bounds."

"Allen, he used to take her—they used to stay together—on *my* farm."

Carrington silently blessed the prudence that had inspired him to change farmers. The Carters' dream was a place of their own; by a generous loan, Carrington had hastened the dream's fulfilment. If they looked on the financial aid as hush-money, that could n't be helped. Not by a single inquiry had he ever hinted to them his consciousness of anything to be hushed; not a single confidence had they volunteered. Now they were lost in the void "out West," where Mrs. Carrington would never find them. Thus reinforced, he was able to lie vigorously.

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"The farm? I don't believe a word of it."

"Everybody's talking of it, Sally says. She was amazed to find how generally it was known. I suppose it did n't get to her before because she's my intimate friend. People seem to think it's a kindness to keep things back. If I'd only known last winter—if I'd ever dreamed——Now, I can only write to Bill."

"Don't do that, Adelaide. Not till we know whether or not this is true."

"But I must!" She was sitting upright again. "Why, Allen! I'm his mother! If his mother pleads with him—the Apgars—some people think wild oats do n't matter, but if this ever gets to the *Apgars*——"

"My dear, I am asking you to wait till we run down this rumor. If we find any truth in it, time enough for appealing to Bill. But if, as I firmly believe, the whole thing's a canard, and you write scolding him for something he's never dreamed of doing, I warn you, Adelaide, you and the boy will never be good friends again."

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"But I must do something. If this should reach Adèle—I'd better go myself. I can sail Saturday."

"My dear girl, calm down. Do n't let malicious gossip deprive you of your usual good sense. Let me find out where Miss Lea is. I can, easily, through the Schumanns."

But though he persuaded her to inaction, he could not persuade her to confidence. If her informant had produced no iota of evidence that Miss Lea had gone abroad, she had produced the Fordyce testimony to the girl's presence at the farm. Carrington's stoutest professions of incredulity were powerless to console her.

He returned home next night in a relief of mind that was not solely on her account.

"Good news, Adelaide. I appealed to the Schumann office—told them your League wanted to get in touch with Miss Lea. Here's her address. She is out in San Francisco, playing stock."

Mrs. Carrington looked doubtfully at the slip of paper he laid before her.

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"But how do we know she really is there?"

Carrington laughed. "Why, my dear, you can't suppose the Schumann office is party to a deep-laid plot to deceive us?"

"Why not? They say Schumann's infatuated with her. A year ago a nobody and now a Broadway star! Everybody says she's Schumann's mistress."

"If she is, then it's certain she's not Bill's."

Mrs. Carrington broke down in tears. "She might. These creatures——"

"If the Schumann office is lying, my dear, if she is abroad with anybody, be certain it's with Schumann. But I see no reason to suppose they're lying. Why don't you write to Miss Lea—tell her the League wants to know her plans for next winter? If you get a prompt reply, postmarked California——" Carrington broke off in a laugh. "But you don't know her handwriting. She might keep an emissary there to answer letters. Adelaide, don't you think you're rather ridiculous?"

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"I think *you* 're horrible! Oh, yes, I know how men look at these affairs. But I did think you were different, Allen, when it 's Bill."

"Adelaide, listen to me. I 'm not joking at the reality of Bill flaunting a dancing-girl all over Europe, like that idle-rich paranoiac in Matteawan. If it were a reality, I should be quite as disgusted as you. I laugh that you should think it could be a reality."

"Bill 's all I 've got in the world," was Mrs. Carrington's reply.

"I know, dear. But need being a mother deprive you of all faculty of logic? However, we 'll not reason about it further. I 've another course to propose. Somebody has got to go to California in that oil case. I meant to send Hazzard, but I can go myself. Then when I 've done in Los Angeles, I 'll run up to San Francisco, buy a ticket to this Alhambra Theater, and find out whether or not Miss Lea is there. I 'll be particular to notice whether it 's the real Miss Lea, or only some one else by the same name. Will my personal testimony on that point be acceptable?"

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"Oh, Allen, can you? I thought instantly of going myself. But with the Ogdens and Murfrees invited for next week——If you *can* arrange to go, it would be in every way the greatest relief!"

And so, accompanied by thanks and blessings, Carrington presently departed westward. He could n't, he assured himself, very well help going.

In San Francisco, before he had even reached his hotel the bill-boards round the vacant lots had informed him of the presence at the Alhambra Theater of Miss Mary Lea (lent by Henry Schumann). Of course it was she herself and of course she was not abroad with Bill. Still, Adelaide would never have been content with anybody's else word for it.

The house was sold out, he discovered; all that remained for him was a stage box, in which he sat in lonely state. The play he had seen in New York the year before, as the vehicle of a more fixed star than this recent addition to the galaxy who now essayed it,

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and he found himself awaiting Mary Lea's entrance in a state of nervousness, and a determination to applaud whatever she did.

The company was capable but undistinguished, their clothes having a certain well-worn air that matched the scenery, their voices lacking the breeding that the Eastern stage at least struggles after.

The door r.c. opened, and Mary stood on its threshold, to be halted there by the wave of applause that rose to her.

The Alhambra popular-prices audience was, Carrington imagined, not highly critical. Their tribute might be paid partly to her beauty, partly to her New York fame. It did nothing to assure him that she could act. The figure of *Morgiana*, bewitching as it was, moved in a world entirely apart from human emotion. With an innocence and gaiety, limpid to the point of heartlessness, she had danced through that Oriental nightmare. In this play she was to depict the humor and the tenderness, the pleasures and the disappointments of life as it is lived. She who seemed

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in her own person so self-controlled, balanced, repressed—could she let herself go? How much was there in her to let go?

He intended to analyze her work in the spirit of coldest criticism. But he found himself watching in pure delight the grace of her body, forgetting the play to wait for certain turns of her head, or tricks of her hands; to listen for certain lifts and falls of her flexible voice. After her big scene, when the curtain rose again to show her leading the company forward to share the applause, he found himself totally unable to say whether she had interpreted the part well or ill; he only knew that he had never once taken his eyes off her; that when she was on the stage, the others were but as trees walking.

He had seated himself as inconspicuously as possible in the back of the box, for he did not intend to seek her out in her private capacity. His report to Adelaide would be the easier the fewer its suppressions. But after the curtain came down for the fifth or sixth time, after the footlights had been lowered,

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and the house lights raised, the applause continued and Mary ran out of the wings at his box's very rail.

In a few minutes a note was brought to him, the fine, careful characters of its superscription preparing him at once for the signature, "Respectfully yours, Myrtle Dewey." "Mary was very much pleased to see you in front, and is anxious you should step round to our dressing-room after the performance."

She was waiting for him at the stage entrance, to pilot him to "our" room. Opening the door a cautious inch, she asked, "Can we come in?"

"Come in!" a gay voice bade from behind a screen. "I 'll appear in just a minute. How are you, Mr. Carrington?"

He gave, as he already had to Miss Dewey, an account of his affair in Los Angeles.

"Then the trial's been held? And you won it? And you've nothing to do now but take a holiday. How long can you stay with us?"

As she uttered the final question, she came

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round the edge of the screen, slipping her arms into the sleeves of her coat.

"Unfortunately, I'm going to-morrow morning at ten."

"Oh, what nonsense! Nobody ever left San Francisco without taking a look at it. Oh, come, it's not done!"

"Maybe Mr. Carrington *has* looked at it, Mary," Miss Dewey interposed. "You need n't think he'd have to come and see you act the first minute he got to San Francisco."

"Is she right, Mr. Carrington?" Mary laughed. "Have you been here a week or two?"

"No, she's wrong. I got in on the boat this afternoon and had no more than put foot on land when the hoardings shrieked at me, above all the din of the barkers, that Miss Lea, late of the 'Morgiana' Company, was playing here for my benefit."

"How did you like it?"

"Like finding you here?" he echoed rather stupidly.

"No, no! Like my part."

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"I liked it just as well as the rest of the audience."

"Really?" she seemed to eye him a little doubtfully. "Honest? Well, never mind now. You can tell me by and by. You 'll come home to supper, won't you?"

"Why, I hoped you 'd let me be host. The fame of the San Francisco restaurants has spread even to effete New York. Won't you and Miss Dewey tell me which is worthiest of our patronage?"

"What kind of cooking do you like best—French, Italian—or Myrtle's?"

He laughed. "Of course, Miss Myrtle's."

"Come along, then. I want you to see our sky parlor."

"You 'll let me get a taxi?" he asked, when, as they emerged from the alley to the street, he saw no motor waiting for her.

"We do n't want it. It 's only a few blocks by cable-car. We 're going to show you how the other half lives."

Her arm was tucked in Miss Dewey's, but, as they reached the car, she stood back to let

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Myrtle enter. "She always rides inside, and I always ride outside," she said. "Which do you choose?"

"Oh, I like the fresh air," Carrington affirmed, sliding after her along the outward-facing seat, forgetful of the fact that on the walk to the theater he had decided that San Francisco in July is comparable to the Arctic Circle.

"Just feel the fog! Isn't it adorable?" Mary demanded, lifting her face to it. "When it washes my face, I feel really clean from the grease-paint." She turned to him, smiling. "This is lots of fun, Mr. Carrington,—our just happening to meet, I mean; your turning up by chance, and not because you have me on your mind."

"And yet you are a little on my mind, Mary. No, no, not Bill. He's in the Black Forest, well and happy by all accounts. But you—what's happened? Why did you leave 'Morgiana'?"

"Because I wanted to, of course," she answered, as if that were the only reason pos-

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sible for any of her actions. "I can't dance all my life, you know. Oh, I shall always, for my own pleasure. But the public won't pay to see me. It's just a fad; this craze about dancing. They'll be tired of it in a year or two. I want to get out of dancing-rôles, before the bottom drops out. I've never done anything in the legitimate, didn't know whether I could, wanted to see. And this summer was a good chance. Schumann raved at first, but he saw my point finally."

"How long do you stay here?"

"Through August. 'Morgiana' is coming back to Broadway in September, and I'm coming with it. But it can't draw all winter, and if it does n't, Schumann's half promised to give me a real play. He'll be back from England next month, and he's coming out here to see how I do. How do I do, Mr. Carrington?"

Carrington laughed. "Mary, I'm not quite sure how or what you do. I could n't swear it's acting. But I do swear I'd like to sit night after night watching you do it."

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"Sacramento! Do n't youse get off at Sacramento?" the gripman's voice came reprov-
ingly over their shoulders. Thanking him,
Mary sprang down to the pavement.

"They all know me," she laughed. And to
Miss Dewey, waiting for them on the corner,
she added: "Myrt, he does n't think I can
act."

"Oh, now!" Miss Dewey protested, not at
the sentiment, but at the wicked ascribing of
it to Carrington.

Above them towered the stately pile of the
Fairmont; below lay the roofs of Chinatown,
the harbor lights, and the dark expanse of the
bay.

"Do n't look!" Mary cried to Carrington.
"Watch your step, instead; you need to. Wait
for the view till you see *our* view."

Passing a little way down the steep and
uneven pavement, they reached a ramshackle
wooden flat-house, in the usual bay-window
style of San Francisco architecture. Miss
Dewey opened with a latch-key one of its
three parallel doors, and clicking on a light,

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disclosed a flight of stairs so long and steep it seemed to lead to the very heavens. She and Carrington essayed it at a sober pace, while Mary flew ahead, disappearing before they had reached the half-way landing. At the top of the stairs, she returned to meet them.

"This way, Mr. Carrington. Now you shall see what you shall see."

In the room into which she led him, there was no light but the flicker of the freshly kindled wood fire.

"Come here to the window. There's not a bit of fog over the bay," she announced, with the pride of a stage-manager.

Far below them, the harbor lights rimmed the dark water, dotted here and there with ferry-boats like fireflies slowly moving. In the distance lay the myriad lights of Oakland, a diamond necklace on the bosom of the night. She stood at his shoulder, silent, letting him drink it in.

The fire snapped into a shower of sparks. Hurriedly Carrington turned to stamp out a

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smoking coal. Mary followed, to switch on the chandelier.

"We 'll have our supper here by the fire," she said. "You clear the table while I get the things."

As she darted back and forth with doilies and silver, glasses and plates, she kept up a running fire of chatter. On one of her appearances, with a bowl of salad, Carrington asked her, "Which do you enjoy most, this or the dancing?"

"Oh, dancing!" she cried fervently over her shoulder, then turned back to qualify her statement. "You see, this is so much harder work. Because I 'm not yet sure of myself: I fumble and grope. I expect to like it by and by; I know I shall, when I can do it. But just now I feel so at a loss: I 've given up one thing and not gained the other. I do n't even practise my dancing; we rehearse every day, and I must have fresh air and sleep. I 'll be a wooden doll when I begin *Morgiana* again; only the public has been taught to admire me and won't know it! You can't think,

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after four years of daily practising, how *guilty* it feels not to be doing it!—as if I 'd left off saying my prayers.”

“I thought you must be tremendously happy over the new work. Because you seem—I can't say you *look* younger here,” Carington corrected himself. “You've always looked to me the youngest, most unworn thing in the world. But to-night you *are* younger.”

She came still a step nearer him.

“Do n't you know what it is?” she laughed. “It's because you're not down on me.”

That was it, of course. He thought it over when she had vanished again to the kitchen. He had always seen her on the defensive, wary, repressed—had taken that for the normal Mary. The real Mary was n't repressed at all, could let herself go, on the stage or off; could change her own emotions, it appeared, as easily as she could change stage rôles. Now, her manner was proof that she no longer had anything to defend from him, that she had absolutely given up Bill. And forgotten him. One would expect such an affair to leave its

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brand on her, but it had not. Was the girl shallow, insensitive? Or was she merely young, with the power of all young lustily growing plants to make new wood over scars?

She called to him from the kitchen door:

"Will you take coffee, like a gentleman? Or cocoa with me? Or tea with Myrtle? She drinks green tea in the middle of the night and sleeps like a babe after it! 'Are n't New Englanders wonderful?' as *Hermione* would say."

But later, when they were seated over Miss Dewey's delicious omelette, she turned to him solemn eyes: "Now then, Ethan Allen, what did you think of me to-night?"

"*Mary!*" Myrtle protested in italics. And to Carrington: "It's a habit she gets from the theater. They always first-name you when they've known you five minutes; just as they're always running round half-dressed. I do n't say they mean any harm; it's just the custom. But this is n't the theater, Mary."

"I first-name her without permission; why should n't she me? Is it so different from

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East Mendham? (I don't mean the half-dressedness; the climate of the White Mountains does n't conduce to that.) But everybody in your county calls you Myrtle."

"Well, I presume they do."

"And everybody in my county used to call me Ethan Allen. But in New York I'm Allen."

"I prefer Ethan Allen," Mary pronounced.

"All right, that's settled. And you, too, Myrtle. Ethan Allen from now on."

Miss Dewey hesitated, "Well, if you really wish it, Mr. Carrington."

"Who?"

"Ethan Allen, then."

"You're interrupting me, both of you," Mary chided. "Now what did you think of my playing?"

Carrington strove to word it. "I saw Elsie Lane in the part and I gulped all the evening. You did n't bring tears to my eyes, but I was glad of it, since I could watch you the better."

She pondered over this. "I know what you mean. I've got a good stage presence, but so

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far I have n't got much else. No. It's awfully hard, stock work—a new play every Sunday, rehearsing one play every morning and playing the other every night. You can't concentrate on your part, get under the skin of it. At least, I can't; I'm too green at it. I'm just beginning to get the feel of a part, when I have to give it up."

"It's frightfully hard work, Mr. Carrington. It's enough to kill the child."

"I do n't kill easily," Mary laughed. "And I'm getting something out of it—readiness—some command of technic. If Schumann will give me a part, and plenty of time to study it, while 'Morgiana' runs on, I'll make you gulp yet. That's going to be my goal in life—to reduce a corporation lawyer to tears."

Myrtle began clearing away. "No, do n't you help me, Mary, you entertain Mr. Carrington." And to him: "No, do n't go yet. It's early, for us theater folks." With a chuckle at her designation of herself, she departed with her tray. Carrington, smoking, watched Mary. In her Indian stillness, she

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sat withdrawn, eyes opaque. He waited for her to come to the surface again.

At last her eyes lighted as she said, "Can you swim?"

Carrington laughed, quoting, "'Do I look it?" said the knave sadly. Which he certainly did *not*, being made entirely of cardboard!"

Her look appraised him. "You're pretty lean and angular, but whatever you're made of, it's not cardboard. You can swim, can't you? I was thinking what would be the nicest thing to do to-morrow, to celebrate. I have to rehearse, but I'll cut it as short as I can, and we'll go across the bay to Neptune Beach."

"That's awfully nice of you. But I've my reservation for the ten o'clock train."

"You don't have to go. It's because you don't really forgive me."

"My dear child—" he was beginning.

"I was at fault," she cut him short. "Very much at fault. I don't defend it. But—I don't think there's any fault so bad it can't

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be forgiven—if you see your mistake and go and sin no more.”

“My dear child,” he repeated, and for the moment could find no other words.

“I do n’t believe in a mush of toleration, in forgiveness when all it means to people is license to go on doing the same thing. No. But if you are really and truly sorry and mean never to do it again——”

“My dear, I do n’t know by what right I set up as a moral censor. But if I did, I could find nothing to be ‘down’ on you for. It’s all wiped out. We do n’t even remember it.”

“All right, then. Let’s go swimming.”

He took Myrtle to the Palace for luncheon, Mary declaring that a Christian meal was not for her. She’d munch a sandwich between her lines and meet them at the ferry.

Mary in a bathing-suit looked just as he had known she would, a sculptor’s joy, and swam and dived as he had known she would, like a jolly little Nereid. After a while he declared himself hopelessly outclassed and, leaving her in the company of another girl of

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the aquatic aristocracy, he sat on the sands with Myrtle, eating an ice-cream cone amidst family parties consuming other cones, peanuts, and hot dogs.

"I do n't know when I've had such a nice time," he said.

"A person does, when Mary's round," Myrtle answered. "Why, at home, we never knew there were such good times as Mary gets out of every little thing. Living with her does n't seem like living in the same old world I used to be in. She—she sort of colors everything."

"And is she as happy as she seems?"

"Why—yes," Miss Dewey considered conscientiously. "Yes, she's perfectly happy. She—she had a real feeling for your son. But it—just went out. She does n't even not mention him."

"She does speak of him?"

"Oh, not constant. When something brings him to mind, as she might speak of any friend. I do n't believe it'll ever start up again. I used to be sorry, but I've come to agree with

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you, Ethan Allen. Her work means too much to her. It's better so."

Arriving at Gray Shingles about ten minutes in advance of a dinner party, Carrington hastened to his wife's room to report.

"Your wire was a great relief, Allen. You saw her yourself? She really is there?"

"I did, and she is. I made some inquiries; it seems she has an ambition to go into the legitimate, and is playing stock, for training. She's working very hard; those stock companies do work like dogs. I should say she is entirely absorbed in her personal ambitions, and not in the least concerned—if she ever was—with Bill."

"Oh, I'm so thankful if it's over! But if it should get to the Apgars! I do wish it had never happened."

"Perhaps it never did."

"But the Fordyces——"

"I suppose they had a basis for the story. I suppose the boy and the girl were at the farm. But he may have merely taken her

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for a drive. They may have been storm-bound like the Fordyces themselves."

"You don't believe that. You just say it to comfort me."

"Oh, well, dear, it's over now. An impulse of youth, that's all. He was keen to go abroad with Charlie. That shows it's all over."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure it must be. He could n't stay infatuated with a creature like that. Thank Heaven, he did n't want to marry her!"

"But had n't you rather he had wanted to?"

His wife turned to him, dropping the pearls she had been about to clasp round her neck, too startled to find words of protest.

Carrington pursued: "I did n't say, Are n't you sorry he did n't marry her? I said, Are n't you sorry he did n't want to?"

"Thank God he did n't!" Mrs. Carrington's sigh was fervent. "Bill has hurt me, Allen. He has hurt me deeply. But he has n't killed me!"

CHAPTER VI

BEFORE the names of *Morgiana* and Mary Lea once more irradiated the front of the Schumann Theater, the battle of the Marne had changed all the values of Carrington's world. However, as the autumn wore away, in spite of his preoccupation with the war and the consequences of war, the dislocations and readjustments of the corporations which were his clients, he made time on Sundays to scan the theatrical news for Schumann's plans. For some weeks his search was unrewarded, Schumann seeming disinclined to admit that even in the midst of world war and panic and hard times, the popularity of "Morgiana" could ever know a wane. Once, finding himself at loose ends for an evening, Carrington went to see for himself. The house was as full as ever, the audience as much delighted.

To Carrington's mood, the lavish setting

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showed no taste, no art, merely crass expensiveness; the atmosphere of Oriental sensuousness was merely a thin disguise of Occidental sensuality. It made him sick. Even the lovely figure of *Morgiana*, skimming like a humming-bird over the scene, made him sick, too. Her complete detachment from the vulgarity around her, which once he had thought her merit, became now an offense. The girl was callous, without sensibilities, to be able to assume *Morgiana's* perfect unconsciousness of evil. He knew, of course, that she was under contract to play the part. But he could not forgive her for playing it so well.

Presently an inspired rumor crept into print. It was believed that Schumann intended to withdraw his highly successful spectacle in the very height of its career, in order to introduce his star in a widely different rôle, a daring innovation that only the Schumann genius could venture on. Later, hints were succeeded by the definite announcement that "*Morgiana*" would give

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way about New Year's to a new comedy of American life, starring Miss Lea. Later still, the name of the piece was given out,—“In the Office,” by Preston Richardson, a young playwright whom Carrington vaguely identified with one or two mildly successful comedies. At least, he said to himself savagely, the play would probably be decent.

Though Miss Dewey had cordially bidden him to be sure to come to see them on their return, and had mailed him, in September, a card with their new address, he had not gone. But at Christmas he discharged his dues of politeness by sending each lady a flowering bow-pot. Miss Dewey's note of thanks came promptly, brief and stiff, like a child's; she lacked practise, poor dear, in acknowledging gifts. Mary never wrote at all, absorbed, no doubt, in the multifarious details of her profession. Carrington was not inclined to quarrel with her silence. By his gift he had shown a friendly attitude, shown that he did not seek to end their acquaintance. But he was entirely willing to let it lapse.

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Then one day she rang him up.

"The azaleas are lovely!" her vivid voice over the wire called up the image of her vivid presence. "They're here on the desk beside me. But I simply have n't had two seconds to myself to thank you. We open in Bridgeport to-morrow, if we're not all taken to Bloomingdale instead."

"How does it go?" he returned politely.

"Oh, do n't ask me! I do n't know. Nobody knows! Schumann's on the verge of suicide. This is a ticklish season, and he says a play about business troubles, when everybody's having business troubles—" she broke off to laugh. "You'll wonder why he took it. On account of the part for me. I'm a bright, ambitious young stenographer that learns all the office secrets and steps in just as the villain partner is looting the good partner, and putting all the blame on the good partner's gooder son. Schumann says I ought to be able to play *Gladys Mae*; I'll just be playing myself."

"Of course you'll be a success. Are n't

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you always? You'll be back on Broadway for the rest of the winter."

"I rang up to ask you not to come to the first night. Do n't! It will be far worse than San Francisco. And I do believe that really I'm better. Come the second week or so——"

"Meantime I wish you the best of luck."

"Thank you. (Yes, Myrt.) I'm off for the dress rehearsal. Pray for me!"

"You have my best wishes always. Good-by and good luck."

"Good-by." But she had no more than said the word when she cried: "Oh, one moment! I meant to ask you, how's Bill?"

"He's all right—so far."

"So far?" she echoed, startled perhaps less by the phrase than by a difference in his voice.

"He's driving an ambulance. Did n't you know?"

"You mean—at the front?"

"Very much at the front. But he's all right, up to date."

"Oh!" her speech came confused, half audible. "Oh, I wish—I wish I had n't talked

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about my footling play. (Yes, Myrt, coming!) I've got to go, I'm late. But oh, I must see you, talk to you. You'll come when I get back?"

"Yes, I will," Carrington promised.

How absurd he had been, he reflected, to assume that the whole world must know his son was in peril. Bill's occupation had been paragraphed on the front page of the papers, about the time of Mary's return, but evidently, absorbed in the exactions of her mimic world, so divorced from the world of reality, she had not seen the despatch.

"In the Office" had not completed the first week of its metropolitan stay when Carrington set out one afternoon to see its star. He found her pleasantly established in a little house in the West Seventies. To the tiny ground-floor reception-room Miss Dewey came hastening to welcome him.

"Oh, Mr. Carrington, and how is that lovely boy? Mary'll be free in a minute. My, but you must be proud of him!"

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Warming to her eager interest, he gave her all his news of Bill, the while she industriously knitted on a wash-cloth.

"My mother used to knit for the Sanitary Commission, in the War of the Rebellion. Now I 'm doing what I can for the Entente Allies. Why, Mr. Carrington, do you suppose there 'd be any chance one of the very cloths I knit might possibly be given to Bill? I 'd love to think it might."

"Why do n't you mail him one, yourself?"

"So I could!" Miss Dewey beamed. "But no, I do n't know as I better. It would remind him of what I guess he does n't want to remember. You know I never did pretend Mary treated him right."

"Oh, yes, she did. We can't make ourselves care."

"No, but we do n't need to chop and change."

"You 've changed, yourself. In California you spoke gently about it. You said it was all for the best."

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"A person feels differently when some one is in danger."

"*Touché!*" Carrington admitted. "I've been hating her all the fall because Bill was at the front and she went on dancing."

"She did n't know that, Mr. Carrington. But she could n't help it, anyhow. It's her living."

He laughed. "We're just alike, Myrtle. We won't either of us hear anybody else criticize her. Anyhow, you do n't need to call me Mr. Carrington."

"Why," she hesitated, "in New York it seems different."

"It is n't. I'm Ethan Allen. How do you like housekeeping in a real house?"

She sighed. "I did hate to leave the flat. When you can't do your own work, home never seems home to me. Mary's got a maid now to wait on her and keep upstairs in order. And we've got that China-boy who let you in; she brought him on from San Francisco. He's a real good cook, I'll say that for him, and clean, but I never get a chance in the kitchen

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except on his day out. Still, the house is lovely. Mary's got a nice sitting-room to see people in. She had to. There was no room in the flat. Her sitting-room and bedroom and bath are on the next floor and mine just the same above. Mary always insists that I must have everything she has. She was real unhappy because the furniture I picked out did n't cost as much as hers."

"I'm sure it's quite as pretty."

"Why, I like it better! You come and see over the house, Ethan Allen. We have so many conveniences; I always say the architect must be a real Yankee. By the time I've shown you over I daresay Mary'll be at liberty. Mr. Richardson's here, going over the fourth act with her. I think it's lovely, just as it is, but Mr. Schumann's got the idea it drags."

Not for a good deal would Carrington have dashed her innocent assumption that a tour of the house would be as delightful and educative as a tour through Versailles, but fate relented to his courtesy by sending the new

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maid to announce tea in the library. "Perhaps there 'll be time after," suggested Miss Dewey hopefully.

They found Miss Mary Lea seated at her well appointed tea-table—in any interview it would be described as well appointed—pouring a cup for the playwright. If she had seemed eighteen in San Francisco, she seemed twenty-eight to-day, so completely mistress of her new elegance, so quietly at ease, as one who had assuredly arrived. Mr. Richardson was presented, a young fellow with a clever, eager face, and "business" of tea ensued.

"What is your opinion, Mr. Carrington," the playwright immediately wanted to know, "of this bothersome fourth act of ours?"

"I 'm embarrassed in the presence of the author and the star——"

"You do think it's weak?" Mr. Richardson's eagerness took the words out of his mouth.

"No. I have n't yet seen the play."

The author looked aghast. Mary smiled as she offered sandwiches.

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"Mr. Carrington did n't come to talk about the play. He came to tell us about his son—a very old friend of Myrtle's and mine—who's driving an ambulance 'somewhere in France.' "

"Oh, but that's very interesting," the young man readmitted Carrington to human fellowship. "Lots of heart interest over there! I want to go over myself when we get this present show straightened out, see France in war-time. I've got an idea for a war play that'll hit 'em between the eyes!"

"I do n't believe I'd like a war play," Miss Dewey relieved the pause that followed on this remark. "I never saw one, and I do n't wish to. I was n't born till after the Rebellion, but my grandfather was killed at Appomattox, and my father was missing for months. I've heard my grandmother and my mother tell too much about what war's like. I hope 'In the Office' will go on ever so long. It's a real sweet play, Mr. Carrington, and Mary's part is lovely. So much nicer for a lady to act than *Morgiana*."

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"Not exactly a New England ideal, was she, Miss Dewey?" Richardson laughed. "But I'm serious, Miss Lea, I'm going to write you an up-to-date war play. No revamping of old Civil War stuff, but something hot off the griddle, from the Kaiser's fires. I'm going over this summer, sure as you live. Perhaps, Mr. Carrington, you'll give me an introduction to that son of yours? There's a heap of local color in ambulance work."

"Yes," the older man assented dryly. "My son seems pretty well smeared with it all the time. Trench mud and blood."

"Say, that's great!" the playwright exclaimed. "I'll be awfully obliged to you for the letter. I'd love to study ambulance work at first hand. You can't put a battle on the stage; even Rostand could n't. He got it across by wonderful poetry. You've seen 'L'Aiglon,' of course. On the English-speaking stage you can't do that. Not that I claim to be a poet. But I'll get it across all right. By hints and suggestions — little cameos from the battle line—little solid nug-

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gets of emotion. I've not worked it out, but I can feel how I'll do it. A touch of ambulance stuff—you could n't have anything better than that."

"I'm afraid I'm like Miss Dewey," said Carrington, "I don't care much for war plays."

"I see what you mean!" the playwright exclaimed. "Your own son being there—yes, wonderful work he's doing, but tough on the parents, of course." And he eyed Carrington so sympathetically yet thoughtfully, withal, that the object of the regard felt sure he was being sketched as an anxious parent, an emotional nugget for the play.

The young man had one merit in Carrington's eyes—he went away shortly, script in hand. As soon as he was fairly out of the room, Mary's gracious-lady manner dropped from her.

"Now tell us about it. I did n't know a thing. Too absorbed in my own little concerns to notice a World War."

"But you're taking notice now." He re-

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garded rather quizzically the half-knitted scarf she was unrolling.

"Myrtle taught me. Because I use my toes, is that any reason why I can't use my fingers?"

"You seem to do it very well. Mrs. Carrington knits in her sleep, I think. I have n't seen her knit since Bill was a baby."

"But tell us about Bill."

"There's not much to tell, fortunately. You knew he was abroad when the war broke out?"

"Yes. But I assumed he got home safely with the rest of the tourists."

"He reached France through Switzerland. His first idea was to go into the aviation, but they turned him down on account of his height and weight. I can't say I was disappointed, though Bill was heartbroken. Then it was suggested to him that if he understood motors there was plenty of use for him as a chauffeur. I used to think the children of the rich had a mighty poor show to acquire any really useful accomplishments, but Bill's money did

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provide one. His mother gave him his own car when he was sixteen. Half his days he was driving it, and the other half he had it spread out all over the floor. Bill's a pretty good mechanic as well as driver. He got a job taking troops to the front in a Paris bus. Later, he drove supply vans. And in November, when the American Ambulance was organized, he transferred to that."

"Is he constantly in danger?"

"Sometimes. He does n't say much about it. I brought some of his letters; I thought you'd like to read them. He's doing his bit splendidly, and we're proud of him."

"Do you think," she asked in a low voice, "do you think he enlisted—because of me?" Myrtle rising, Mary put out her hand in a quick detaining gesture, but her friend slipped from the room.

"No, I do n't," Carrington's steady eyes met her troubled ones. "I think it was the spirit of seventy-six."

"Ever since you told me I've felt—Myrtle

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has, too—oh, I've felt that if he were killed——”

“You need n't. Bill would have done the same thing if Mary Lea had never existed.”

“Do you say that just to comfort me—you're always so good to me!—or because you really mean it?”

Carrington laughed. “My dear, last spring, Bill might have committed any kind of insanity, all along of you. But six months later, if he is guilty of a rash act, you may be sure he's got another motive.”

“Oh, I hope so! I do hope so!”

“You women are conceited creatures. You're determined to believe that love of you is the one great driving force that makes the world go round. Well, it is a driving force, in its season. Other seasons, other forces. Bill, now—what drives him is partly love of adventure, I guess—danger for its own sake. But—well, he wrote to his mother that he felt as if his grandfather Carrington, who shouldered a musket all through the Civil War, could n't lie quiet in his grave if his only

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grandson was n't doing his bit to drive the Boches off French soil. Bill does n't slop over and talk about his duty to civilization; he only talks about strafing the Huns. But I said to his mother: 'You belittle the boy if you do n't see that his motive has nothing whatever to do with the private affairs of one Bill Carrington.' "

"Did she think it had?" Mary pounced on him. "Does Mrs. Carrington know—about me?"

"Not from me. She's heard some gossip," Carrington admitted ruefully. "Mary, I'm a pretty poor lawyer to give that away."

"Oh, dear! And I thought our affair was just our affair. I never meant it to hurt any one else." She moved restlessly about the room. "I wonder—could I—if I went to her——"

"Better not. Let it rest. I've told her the stories are mere malicious gossip. She scarcely believes them. Better not protest too much."

With a sigh she dropped into her chair

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again. "No, I suppose not. She would n't like to see me. Oh, I 'm not pleased with myself to-day. If I 'd studied medicine, as Father wished, I could go over there and be of some use. But I only thought of 'getting ahead.' Never, whether or not I was going to amount to anything when I was ahead. So now I 'm perfectly useless! I hardly suppose they 'd care to have me dance to 'em, in the trenches."

"I should think they might like it immensely," Carrington smiled.

"My life 's so *selfish*," she arraigned it. "I 've never thought of anything but how *I* was going to get on. Just I, I, I! Oh, of course I give to the Belgian Relief—what I can perfectly well spare. But I do n't give myself. I do n't *do* anything for anybody on earth."

"You 've done a deal for Myrtle."

"She's my family," Mary put that aside. "Besides, the shoe 's on the other foot. She works her fingers to the bone for me; I do n't do anything for her except supply a little

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money." She brooded. "Money! That's the only thing I can do, I suppose—earn a salary. To draw checks for the war charities—that will be my only part in the world struggle."

"You'd rather play Molly Pitcher, or Elizabeth Zane bringing up the powder?"

"Or even Jeanne d' Arc leading the armies? Would n't I, just! If there was one single thing I could do that some splendid Frenchwoman or Englishwoman is n't already doing better, I'd chuck my contract to-morrow and go over." She laughed at her own fire. "Of course, I can't, and I shan't. I shall go on ministering to the tired business man. But oh, Ethan Allen, you know! This great war—it makes all our concerns seem so *little!* Spending a whole afternoon, as I've just done, in trying to figure out just why that comedy bit in the last act did n't get as many laughs as it should—it all seems such piffle."

"Take care! That's a dangerous attitude of mind for a brand-new star in a brand-new part."

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"Oh, it is n't my attitude in the theater. I'm keener than any one else for the play to succeed. I work at it and think about it every minute, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night. And then I lie awake feeling how trivial it all is."

"The war's getting on your nerves, Mary, as it's getting on all our nerves."

"At first I did n't pay much attention to it. I've never been abroad; I've always lived in California, where Europe seems so remote. It was their war—no concern of ours. But it's overtaken me, Ethan Allen, caught me up. I can't escape."

"If you want something for a bromide at night, there's dreadful suffering this winter in New York. Our industries are all hit. There's more unemployment, more hunger, than ever before. Our charities are swamped: too many people think they're doing their part when they send money to Belgium. Do without that fur coat you mean to buy, and get clothes for the tenement children."

"I will! Thank you. I will. After all,

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you can be of some use, can't you, if all you can do is to earn money?"

"It's a lot. Do what you can with your money, my dear girl, and then sleep nights. Your lying awake won't end the war, or help the misery of the war. And if you worry yourself sick, you stop the golden stream."

She laughed. "Worry's the most futile thing of all, is n't it? More futile even than playing in footling little plays? No, I'll not worry any more, now that you've let me blow off steam to you. You'll come again some time?"

"Why, I hope so. But we're both pretty busy people——"

Her eyes clouded. "Yes, I see."

He took her hand. "Dear, you do n't see if you imagine I'm the least bit 'down' on you. It is n't that."

"No, I know. It's Mrs. Carrington. If she should learn that you know me, she'd have to be told the whole thing." She pondered. "I'd like to go, myself, and tell her."

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I think I could make her feel less badly about it."

"Don't try it!" Carrington hastily besought. She with her Red Indian directness let loose on Adelaide! What would n't her candor come out with! "I mean," he explained, "to her it's nothing definite—only gossip, scarcely credited and now I hope forgotten. Better not bring it up again."

"I'd like to try," she hesitated. "But no, better not." She added in a different tone, "But Ethan, New York's very large."

"Yes, and very small, too. But my good wishes will always be with you, Mary my dear."

In the ensuing months, "In the Office" mounted to a steady popularity. In Carrington's opinion the play was shallow claptrap. Since it was young Richardson's he had decided that before he went. And, indeed, it was the general opinion that the star carried the piece. This achievement of Miss Lea's was admitted even by her detractors. The

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critics were divided into two camps. The first maintained that in conception and in method, her *Gladys Mae* was the very antithesis of her *Morgiana*, that only genius could compass them both. The other camp declared that in any true sense Miss Lea did not impersonate *Gladys Mae* at all, but merely danced through the part as she had danced through *Morgiana*, her beauty and grace and vitality so beguiling the spectators that they were not capable of seeing her shortcomings. She brought to the spoken drama the immense advantage of being on good terms with her hands and her feet, her neck and her shoulders. She never seemed conscious of her body; certainly she was never worried about it, knowing it would carry out perfectly whatever she asked of it. This surety lent her an immense buoyancy, a spiritual health rooted in her perfect physical health. Her *Gladys Mae* was gay, confident, with a courage springing up undaunted after all rebuffs and insults.

The public, Carrington decided, took *Gladys Mae* to its heart because Mary had

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contrived to endow the figure of the little stenographer with her own courage. Her own energy, pluck, go, she had managed to project across the footlights. "And if that is n't acting," Carrington meditated, "what is? I'm a successful corporation lawyer, but I could n't walk on with a brief-case and at once convince the audience that I am, any more than the experiment has ever worked of putting on the boards real waiters, real sailors, real firemen. They do n't know how to act themselves. Every trait of *Gladys Mae* in the text might be a trait of Mary Lea, and yet Mary might n't be able to get one of 'em across. She does get 'em across; well, then, she can act. Is it never to be called acting, unless the actor portray a character remote from his own? That feat necessitates greater virtuosity, not greater artistry. And, indeed, no actor portrays a character remote from his own; or if he does, it is a mere mimicry, not an impersonation. One cannot truly portray a character without imagining it first; and a character that one is able to imagine is not

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actually remote from his own. He builds it up out of shreds and tatters, perhaps despised tatters, of his own personality. The most open-handed of us have had our impulses of grudging; from one such occasion of meanness, imagination can build up the point of view of the miser. We all have our moments, our perhaps abortive impulses of courage, fear, anger, love, all the emotions common to mankind. We all have in ourselves the raw materials from which imagination (be it only powerful enough) can build up any character you choose."

Carrington smiled to find himself in virtual agreement with both camps of critics. He did think Mary was acting (and triumphantly) the part of *Gladys Mae*; but then, *Gladys* was closely akin to Mary. Without the education her doctor father had given her, with less balance and more easily stirred emotions, Mary might have been another *Gladys*. Here her imagination had had an easy task. The test of her powers would come when she

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was cast in some character superficially quite remote from her own. Carrington resolved that if ever he encountered Mr. Richardson again he would suggest to him to call his next play "The Clinging Vine!"

One day in late spring, he rang the bell of the little house on the West Side. Myrtle came to the door, clad, as when he had first seen her, in gingham and a crisp white apron. She looked so New Englandy that he beamed upon her.

"Mary's out riding with Mr. Richardson." Her delight in his appearance was mixed with distress. "I'm afraid they won't get back till her rest hour."

"I should n't think of disturbing her routine. No, you'll do just as well, my dear friend. In fact, better. And never mind tea; I can stay but a moment."

"It would n't take a moment," she hospitably demurred, but on his insistence consented to sit down tea-less in the tiny reception-room.

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"Look at this," he gave her a blue slip from his pocket-book.

"Why," she explained, surprised not by the check but by his manner, "we read a piece in the paper about this society, with your name as treasurer; and Mary and I both said right away it would be a good one to give to. We'd feel sure it was well run and our money would count."

"Thank you. I hope I can say it *is* well run. But Mary—but you and Mary must n't strip yourselves for its sake."

Miss Dewey laughed. "I do n't look hungry, do I? Why, Mr. Carrington, we're pretty careful about money, both of us. Me because I've always had so little to do with. I can't be happy riding in a taxi: I keep thinking how much I could save if I took a street car. Mary does n't feel the same about taxis: she says the first thing she's got to save is her strength. But if it is n't something she needs in her business, she does n't care what she has. This house, now. She had to have a place to see people. And a good chance

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came along to get a bargain. Schumann thought she'd done real well when she told him. You see, Mary never did live up to her salary. She's got quite a little bit put away."

"But she must n't touch that——"

"Oh, she has n't, except the cash down for the house. Mary's real prudent; she wants to be a producer herself, some day. No, how we got this money, we saved it, over and above what we save every month to put away. We sent the girl away—Mary found her another place—and I must say it was a happy day for me when she went, and I got all upstairs for my own. Mary only engaged the girl because she wanted to spare me, and, as I say, if I do n't want to be spared? If I do n't know what to do with my time when I am spared?"

"I hope you have n't sent away the competent-looking Heathen Chinees."

"Oh, no; Mary said she could n't, after bringing him on. And though he does get big wages, I can't say he does n't earn 'em. He goes down to the market three times a week.

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And he does n't waste as much as a grain of rice. And clean! About all I knew of the Chinese I heard in missionary meetings, but I've had to reverse some of my ideas since Wing's been in the house. Mary told him why she wanted to send away Delia, and he said 'Allight. I clean upstairs, too. Too hard for Miss Dewey.' And though there's nothing I enjoy more than working that vacuum cleaner, he won't let me."

"Too bad! But I should think"—Carrington, though he laughed, was serious—"that if she goes on this way"—he touched the check—"you'd soon be reduced to doing all your own work, and taking boarders besides."

"I'd as lief. Why, I do n't see what you're fussing about. We're able to give that, and we think we can give as much every quarter, and we're proud and happy that we can. Why, Ethan Allen, you do n't think I'd let her impoverish herself, do you? You do n't think I'd see *Mary* suffer for anything she ought to have?"

"I think I'm fussing," Carrington con-

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fessed, "because she's doing so much more in proportion to her means than I am. And so I am bound to maintain that her proportion is quixotic and positively wicked. She has two servants and gives up one. I've got about a dozen, inside the house and out, and I'm told that each one is indispensable to our continued existence."

"Well," Myrtle considered, "in these big establishments—not that I ever was inside of one, except to a suffrage meeting—I can see it would n't be so easy to cut down. I presume each one of the help does just one particular thing, and they would n't double up if you asked them."

"No. If we must live on the scale we have been living on, these last years—Our big house does take a lot of servants to run it. I suggested a flat, and Mrs. Carrington agreed that it would be less care. But when I was taken to see the flat picked out, and found that it had to be a whole floor of one of these new apartment buildings, and that, though it might require a servant or two less than the house,

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the rent was considerably more, and that the moving would mean new curtains and upholstery and rugs—well, I saw I was just running around the squirrel cage. I was n't getting out."

He wondered why in the world, to this New Hampshire spinster of narrow experience, he was airing perplexities he had not confided to his closest friends. But the fact was, he rejoiced in Mary's absence so that he might air them. To Miss Lea he could not, by remotest implication, criticize his wife. He did not know why it seemed pardonable to do so to Miss Dewey. But somehow it did.

"Well," she meditated, "I see just how it is with Mrs. Carrington. I know she was an heiress; Bill told us. She's never lived any other way, and she does n't see that there is any other way. Like a child. Children always believe they'll go on living forever the way they're living now. They suppose—if they ever stopped to think about it, which of course they do n't—that the present order of things, three meals a day all fixed for 'em,

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and somebody to sew on their buttons, is a dispensation from on high. I think rich people are sort of like children: they do n't see how the world could possibly be any different. Ladies, especially. They live more in a glass case, like, than gentlemen."

"Oh, men can get pretty well acclimated under glass. For several years now I've kept a valet. I did n't like the idea, at first. I'm from rock-ribbed New England, too, and I prefer, or I used to prefer, to wait on myself. A man getting his living by nursemaiding another man seems to me a contemptible spectacle: I blush for my valet, if he does n't blush for himself." Carrington broke into a laugh. "I'm perfectly inconsistent, for the position of women-servants does n't trouble me. I think it's menial in James to lay out my clothes, and I do n't think it's menial of Mary Ann to sweep my floor. It's because my mother kept maids, and I accepted them in childhood—in your apt phrase—as part of the dispensation from on high. But I hate men in the house! I hated the butler when he

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dawned upon us; I hate his successor to-day. When we set up a useful man as well, I resented Mrs. Carrington's suggestion that he valet me in his spare time. However, my work was heavy, in those years, my office hours were long, and we went out a good deal, too. It was a relief to find my clothes always ready. Later on, the useful man had so much to do that I set up an out-and-out gentleman's gentleman."

"He must be real handy. And I dare say, if he's an Englishman, or any kind of a foreigner, he does n't worry any about being a menial."

"No, it did n't seem to worry him. But after Bill went to war it got intolerably on my nerves. Me, petted like a Persian cat, and my boy sleeping in a cellar. So I sent away the valet. Mrs. Carrington assured me that my rashness would make trouble, the third man would find it very inconvenient to wait on me. 'I do n't want him to,' says I. 'Let the third man fry his own fish, and I'll fry mine.' So now I lead a Spartan existence and put in my

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own cuff-links. And I have to confess to you that it's hard work."

Miss Dewey was amused. "It always is, to men-folks. I had to lay out Father's clean things for Sunday, and fetch the hot water for him to shave. You goin' to have the valet back?"

"No. Not alone because I send his wages to the Belgian orphans. As Mrs. Carrington points out, the money is very little, and I could make it up in any number of other ways. (Though I don't know what way, when to every economy I suggest, the answer is 'Oh, no, we could n't do *that*.') However, the reason I won't take on the valet again is that when I'm most uncomfortable without him I feel nearest to Bill. Does that sound idiotic?"

"Why, no. That's just exactly how Mary and I feel, since we've been living more simple."

"Nearer to Bill?"

"Why, I didn't mean Bill, particularly. I meant all those poor French and Belgians

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driven out of their homes. Bill's not suffering." Then, suddenly flushing, "Why, Ethan, I never once asked after him! You startled me so with that check. He *is* all right?"

"Yes, indeed. The bullet with his name on it has n't come along yet. We hope there is n't one."

"Oh, I do hope so! You'll think me so unfeeling, never asking! But we talk about him often, Mary and I."

"Do you? I've wondered——Does his being over there——"

"You mean, does it change her toward him? Why, Ethan, she thinks he's perfectly splendid. But no, I can't see it's changed her."

"She's pretty proud. After sending him away, and sending him away (I guess) mighty sore and angry, she might n't like to own up to wanting him back."

"She's not proud that way. When Mary's made a mistake she owns right up. No, if she wanted Bill back—well, the first thing she'd do would be to tell you."

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"Would she?"

"Why, of course. She thinks the world and all of you, Ethan."

"I hope she does know I'm her friend. But, still, the directest of us—in affairs of the heart we're all tortuous. I don't feel so sure she would."

"Yes. I know Mary. She could n't rest to have it out. She would——"

"What would I, Myrt?" called a clear voice from the hall. "For I know I'm the she you're talking about, and I shan't hear any good of myself. Oh, Ethan Allen, it's you!"

She ran up, both hands outstretched. With Myrtle present, it occurred to Carrington that he might kiss her. He did n't, though. Only pressed her hands a moment and let them go.

"I was pumping Myrtle about you," he answered honestly. "Now I'll pump yourself. Do you feel as if you'd like to take our William back?"

The gaiety of Mary's face gave way to grimness.

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"Why is n't he in the Foreign Legion?" she shot out.

"Ambulance-driving is n't exactly a parlor game," Carrington retorted, taken back.

"No, no, I do n't mean he's a coward. He need n't be there at all; it is n't his war. But since he is there, since he cares enough to risk his life, why is n't he in the fighting line? I could n't stand it, ministering to the Boche's victims. I'd get a gun."

"I hear you made a highly unneutral speech at the Belgian Benefit."

"You bet I did! They poked me out in front of the curtain to say a few gracious words of thanks to our generous audience. First thing I knew, I was letting out about the war. Schumann came to me, raving that half the audience were Germans. Good God! I hope they were!"

"Mary, I've never before seen you 'let out,' off the stage. You're such a cool hand, I used often to wonder how you could be an actress."

With a little tremulous laugh at her own

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excitement, she took off her black tricorn to lay it with her gauntlets on the table.

"It takes the grease-paint to set me free. You've known men who were dull, or morose, till they'd had a few drinks? Then the gray spark was kindled? The stage does that to me. I suppose that is why I love it so."

"Well, I see my question's answered—about Bill. But honestly, Mary, I didn't come here to demand your intentions. I don't know exactly how Myrtle and I got round to the subject. What I came for was to return to you your preposterous check."

"Are shoes for children preposterous?" Taking the slip from Myrtle's outstretched hand, she put it into Carrington's waistcoat pocket. "There, cash it, or I'll bring you the amount in pennies."

"If you go on this way, you'll soon be without shoes yourself."

"What's that, to a barefoot dancer?"

"No, seriously, I can't let you give any such sum. Even the treasurer of a benevolent society has a heart."

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“Seriously, I ’m not reducing myself to beggary. And if I were, why not? I should n’t be any worse off than half the world. Besides,”—an imp danced in the depths of her eyes—“what a valuable experience for me,—to get the feel of beggary, as Richardson would say!”

CHAPTER VII

NEXT season, "In the Office" went on the road. Carrington followed its triumphant career in the notes from Myrtle which accompanied Mary's quarterly checks. From Chicago, from New Orleans, and from the coast they came, telling him joyfully that never was such a triumph. Everywhere the audiences seemed to love Mary even better than New York had done. Mary was well and, of course, happy in her success, "if we could feel we had any right to be so happy these dreadful times. Out here in the West people do n't take the war the way New York does. You could almost forget it. Only Mary and I never could forget. We are so glad that nothing has happened to Bill."

Myrtle's first two notes Carrington acknowledged promptly, but her letter of March still lay unanswered when the June check arrived, accompanied by two lines in a hand

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not Myrtle's. "I have just read that you are back. Oh, do come and talk to me. Any time. I'm not playing."

He went after dinner. The evening was as breathless as midsummer, and on the unfashionable West Side the inhabitants were camped out on the stoops in good old New York fashion. At the house where Carrington stopped, there sat on the upper step a solitary white-clad female figure who, he feared, was a new maid, and who sprang up the instant she saw him, to grip his hand in her boyish clinch. For a moment neither of them thought of saying anything.

"Shall we sit here?" Mary found voice first. "Or go inside?"

"Why, I took the taxi hoping you'd like to drive. To Claremont or anywhere where it's cool."

"I'm afraid I'd better not. You see, I told Myrtle I was too tired to go to a meeting for the *Lusitania* victims. She said this was n't a time when a person ought to con-

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sider her own feelings. Send the cab away and we 'll sit here.'

When he dropped on the cushion beside hers, she began: "I ought to have written you. It was n't because I did n't care. But I can't write letters. I never wrote one in my life."

"And I wanted to write you. But we sailed on three hours' notice. Literally, I had n't one minute. Then, in Paris it was hope and despair, despair and hope. When we finally dared believe Bill was going to live—well, I thought you must be in New York by then; I could see you when I got back."

"And I thought so, too. How is Bill? Doing as well as that Paris despatch said? You see, I 've learned to read, at least."

"Yes, he 's doing splendidly, though he 'll always be lame."

"Oh," she cried in such distress that in the midst of his own distress he smiled.

"That seems catastrophe to you, you spirit of motion. But there are things lame men can do. When his mother and I saw his frac-

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tured skull heal, we did n't grieve much about his leg."

"Will he—the article said he would n't be disfigured."

"No, the doctors promise us not at all. This new facial surgery is simply a miracle, his mother writes me. Very soon she expects to be able to take him over to England, down to Devon or somewhere well away from the war, to build him up, before he tries the journey home."

"He's going to stay out, then?"

"Oh, yes, for a while at least. We insist on that. And anyhow, his leg insists on it."

Without comment, she went back to an earlier phase of the conversation.

"I must have looked a pig, not writing. You had Myrtle's letter?"

"Yes, in Paris. Please thank her sincerely for it, and for the one before, which I never answered. And don't say any more about *your* sins of omission. Tell me all you've been doing and all you're going to do. Child, I have n't seen you for a year."

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"My year's been like all my years—penitentiary rules. I open in September in a new play, Gordon Payne's. Myrtle and I are going up to her place for six weeks of real rest. Then I come back for rehearsals. Then two weeks' try-out, up-state and around. Then Broadway all winter, we hope."

"Do you like the play?"

She laughed. "Payne wrote it for me. I'm a society girl who wants to elope with the chauffeur, because he's a real man with red blood in his veins, and I find society so hollow and its people all shams. Then my father gets busy and shows up the chauffeur, how he's considerable of a sham himself, joy-riding other ladies, etc. My heart is broken. I'm dreadfully humiliated, but still I won't give in. I won't admit that all I said about Fifth Avenue was n't true. So I elope by myself and go to work in a laundry. (Real tubs that would have delighted Mr. Crummles. But I guess they won't venture on the real steamy smell.) Then I meet a noble young riveter who spends his spare time

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addressing workmen's meetings on the Uplift. Lester Clarke, of course, looking *ever* so manly with his shirt open. He says to me, he says: 'Maggie, I know your name ain't Maggie. I can see you come from a different sp'ere from mine. I know your living down here in Mulberry Bend is but a play to you. But, oh, Maggie, could you make it real?' I could, and my distracted parents find me frying onions in a back tenement and they wish they had let me marry the chauffeur. My father offers me all the kingdoms of the earth to divorce the riveter, but I merely go on frying the onions. And then he comes in and is recognized as *Reggie Astorbilt*, the eccentric millionaire. There! Do n't you think the public will eat it?"

"It and you. For all you mock I can see a lot of you in it. Those speeches denouncing the life of the idle rich—you 'll have fun saying them, Mary."

"Well, most of it is awful bunk. But I did suggest some of the lines. As Payne had it, *Margaret* objected on high moral grounds to

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a life of pure pleasure. I told him what was driving her away from home was n't pleasure, it was dullness."

"You and the discovered *Reggie*—do you return to the purlieus of plutocracy?"

She gave an impatient shrug.

"Yes, delightedly. Love makes all the difference. Is n't it sickening?"

"You sentimental soul!"

Turning him a little smile, she said quietly: "You know, I am, rather. I have a dream. That's why they all say I'm hard as nails."

"Billy and Schumann and Richardson and Lester Clarke and Payne *et al*?"

"Oh, leave out Al: *he* never said it!" But after her laugh she grew grave again, looking straight before her out across the street. "Some day I'll get a play that is n't twaddle. Then I'll play my dream. That's the time I'll make you gulp, Ethan Allen."

"You're but young yet, Mary. It won't stay always a dream."

"Do you know, I think it will." She was speaking in the same quiet almost absent tone,

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the most intimate tone she had ever used with him. "You see, I've had an extraordinary worldly success; it's made me believe in my star. When I look ahead, I never see myself failing, I never see myself poor. If the stage public stopped liking me, there's any number of other things to turn to—producing plays, or designing women's clothes, or running a stock farm; lots of things. I never see myself not getting on. But nobody has everything."

"Some darlings of fortune do. You're one, Mary."

"No. When I see myself growing old, it's always alone." She stirred, shook herself like a sleeper waking. "What a funny conversation to be having on the front steps, in sight of a policeman, two cooks, a cross couple with a cross baby, a placid old couple coming home from prayer-meeting—or is it the movies?—and eight flappers on the way to ice-cream."

"We're not on the front steps," said Carington. "We're on the beach at Falesà, or some other coral island with a singing name."

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And the surf makes a magic around us so that not even the sea-birds know what we say to each other, and we say anything that's in our hearts, without fear of being laughed at."

"Nobody else can come on our island?" she asked him, like a child following a story.

"No. There's only one channel through the surf. Nobody else knows it. And even then, you have to have a charm!" He laughed abruptly and rose. "Tell Myrtle she's too philanthropic. I'm sorry to have missed her."

"You must go?" she said a little dazed.

"I have an appointment with a client, 'after dinner.' He's no doubt one of *Margaret's* father's pals; 'after dinner' is about ten. Good-night, dear. My love to Myrtle."

In September occurred two dates important to Carrington,—the arrival of Mary's play, and the arrival of Bill. "Paste Jewels," as Mr. Payne had christened his protest against shams, came first, saw and conquered. It was, Carrington considered, a better effort than Richardson's, more human, and despite

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its descents into what Mary called bunk, more sincere. Bunk was Payne's—or perhaps the theater's—medium of expression, but his seemed heartfelt bunk that almost imposed on you, he himself believed in it so simply. The star, too, had gained. Her *Margaret* was a more appealing figure than her *Gladys Mae*, showing, throughout its hot young rebellion, touches of wistfulness, touches of timidity. Carrington wanted to write her that her ambition was realized; she had made him gulp. But he did n't write her or see her. He had sent her flowers on her first night. He let that suffice.

A fortnight later, he went down to quarantine to meet his wife and son. He could have gulped over Bill, easily enough, immensely improved though the boy was. "Would you ever have known him, Allen? Is n't it marvelous? Does n't he look perfectly himself again?" Mrs. Carrington's satisfaction seemed genuine, not put on for the patient's benefit, and Carrington perceived that her mind always compared the present Bill

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with the gruesome wreck they had found at Neuilly, and not with the debonair young chap setting off on his pleasure-joint two years before. To her, every day's restoration was unalloyed happiness. But Carrington's memories went farther back—Bill in his football armor, Bill at the Glee Club dance, Bill in his office that spring day asking leave to go abroad; and now this Bill whose bones seemed rubbing through his clothes, whose rebuilt face was curiously immobile like a mask, whose young eyes did n't look young. This Bill was, however, a Bill entirely cheerful, neither asking sympathy nor enduring it. To Carrington's groan, once in the early days when he slipped on his crutches, he replied, "It's all right, Dad. I'll be rid of these nuisances one of these days. And if I was n't, no matter. I do n't regret anything."

Carrington wondered how much that "anything" covered. Though he believed his own assurances to Mary that Bill had not enlisted because of her, yet he had been abroad be-

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cause of her. He wondered—and abruptly asked his son.

“Boy, if I had n’t let you go abroad, if you had got started in business, do you suppose you ’d have joined the A. A.?”

“Yes,” Bill answered without a moment’s hesitation, “the A. A. certainly. But of course I’d have missed the first Marne and all my French service. It was gorgeous luck, being right there when it all broke. I would n’t have missed a day of it.”

Carrington was n’t altogether sure, though he saw Bill felt sure, that the boy would have walked out of Mr. Wilson’s office into the American Ambulance. Bill, having beheld France mobilize, could no longer recall the self that he was before he had seen it. He supposed he had been born as intensely pro-French as that first week in August had made him. But it was altogether probable that if Mary Lea had never thrown a wrench into the smooth revolutions of his existence, Bill would have been a whole broker at this moment.

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And yet he was saying with such conviction, "I would n't have missed a day of it."

"Oh, well," Carrington sighed, "if you can stand being lame, I suppose my sensibilities ought to stand *seeing* it."

Laughing, Bill stumped over to lay a hand on his father's shoulder.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you, Governor. You're envious."

"Envious?"

"Of course you are. This mutilation business would n't bother you one bit, if it was only you. Naturally, a prominent corporation lawyer can't suddenly chuck his clients, to go camp in French ditches. Mother'd have had you put in a padded cell if you'd so much as hinted at it. I do n't suppose it ever occurred to you. But all the same you'd have loved it!"

"You're wrong about one thing, Bill," Carrington said after a moment while he silently pressed the hand on his shoulder. "It has occurred to me very often. But I seem to be pretty useful as a lawyer. I could n't

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be sure of my capacity as a Red Cross man. And then your mother——”

“My dear man, you could n’t do it. But you ought to have beaten me with a club if I had n’t.”

It did indeed seem that Bill regretted nothing. As his convalescence progressed, his mother kept the house more and more filled with young people, of whom Adèle Apgar was not too obtrusively one. Bill, though declining with horror invitations to speak at benefits or “receive” at ladies’ clubs, was not averse to unofficial hero-worship. The artless respect of his former compeers pleased while it amused him. “They all seem about five years old, Governor,” he once confided. “But I enjoy seeing girls with no more cares than so many fluffy kittens and fellows that are still keen about games. There are n’t any like that, over there.”

By the New Year, his crutches discarded for a heavy stick, Bill was able to walk very well by himself. With increasing strength came increasing restlessness, both physical

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and mental. He wanted always to be out-of-doors, to be in motion. Sometimes he was content to drive, but more often he must be on foot, trying his leg. He became quite openly bored with "The Fluffs," less openly but still obviously bored with his mother's tireless attentions.

"I can't think Bill's as well as he was," she confided, distressed, to her husband. "I do n't care what Dr. Cary says, that he is stronger every day. He's much more nervous than he was, does n't eat or sleep as well."

"'Nervous' being polite for cross, my dear. Yes, I have noticed it. It is just a phase of convalescence. When his forces were so low, Nature's one aim was to replete. Lying on your chaise longue and drinking egg-nogs and listening to Adèle just suited Mother Nature's program. Now he's past that."

"He ought not to take long walks, Allen. His leg might give way. I beg and beg him to let me go with him."

"You're not very much of a walker, are you, Adelaide?"

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"I can walk as far as Bill ought to."

"But hardly at his pace. Lame as he is, Bill wants to get over the ground. It's very natural, he's been hovered over so long. You can't want him to stay an invalid, dear, just so you can nurse him."

"Allen! How can you say such a thing! Nobody could be half as eager to see him well as his mother is. What I try to restrain him from is only crazy over-exertion."

"And you don't succeed, my dear, only make him—nervous. Best let him alone."

Though Mrs. Carrington herself did not suspect it, her husband felt convinced that if Bill had been brought home to her a hopeless invalid, she would have been truly happy the rest of her days. A Bill who turned to her for every comfort and pleasure would fill her life. But she did not know how to minister to him, except physically. A Bill who left the house after breakfast, often not turning up till dinner, and then with most stingy accounts of his day—this Bill was lost to her.

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She could only drift back to her bridge and her charities, her dinners and her clothes.

While Bill had been a "casualty," for the first time in years Carrington had felt really close to Adelaide. For years he had occasionally caught himself wondering just how it happened that the present Mrs. Carrington was his wife. He had married a tall wisp of a girl, very light on her feet and graceful as a reed swaying; he was always sensitive to beautiful motion, the suggestion of lightness, buoyancy. This Mrs. Carrington of East Sixty-eighth Street weighed a great many more pounds than her excellent corsetière intended you to know. Yet you did know it, inevitably, from the inertness of the well-boned figure. It was many years since Adelaide had walked; why should she, with a new limousine? By the time the limousine had lost its first fascination, she could n't walk, her slender, small-boned feet refusing to support the woman she had become. They were the only survival of her girlhood, these dainty, useless feet. Her fingers under their load of

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rings were no longer what he had once called them, "pretty claws," her face no longer showed its bony young contours. It was the more beautiful for that, perhaps, but it was different. No, it was not fair to call her feet the only survival; she had her lovely fair hair without a gray thread in it, but hair so marvelously dressed by her expert maid that in its puffs and twists and undulations Carrington could never see any resemblance to the tumbling mass that she used to "stick up anyhow" to beat him down to breakfast in their first housekeeping days. It was not because Adelaide was growing old; all the illustrated papers called her one of the most beautiful matrons of New York. Good God, he himself was growing old every day, and in a much uglier way than hers, stringy and lantern-jawed! No, a man who cares only for physical youth ought to be driven over the cliff with the rest of the swine. It was not because Adelaide was thirty-five, forty, forty-five, that he no longer found her interesting; it was just that—that he did n't. He always remained

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fond of her, used to her. Both of them were well-disposed people, neither irritable nor difficult; their relations had always been pleasant. Carrington could quite see her keeping house for him, a dear sister or familiar first cousin, but he never with "that inward eye" saw her as his wife.

During the two years of Bill's absence this feeling of division grew. There was no doubt that Adelaide, just as she was later to enjoy Bill's sickness, enjoyed the war. At once she was deep in twenty relief projects. She'd always done her duty on the boards of the standard charities, but they lacked the dramatic appeal of war work. The bazaars, dances, tableaux, garden-parties, plays, all were intensely irritating to Carrington. Why could n't people hand out their money for the starving and be done with it? The women of New York seemed to suppose the Kaiser had devastated Belgium on purpose to give them a chance to parade around in fancy dress. Carrington, these days, was in a decidedly Franciscan mood; and, like St. Francis, he

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was trying to his family circle and it to him. Sometimes, in discussing the expenses of the town and the country house he betrayed an acrimony quite foreign to him, and, Mrs. Carrington felt, to the subject. His impossible suggestions she parried with perfect good temper, serene in the consciousness that no woman in her set was doing or could do more for the Entente Allies. Moreover, she knew that Allen's nerves were all on edge over Bill. After the first few days of his enlistment, spent in passing from crying-fit to faint-turn and back to crying-fit, imploring Allen to get Bill out, to entreat the French Government, bribe it, threaten it, bring down the wrath of the whole United States upon it, but get Bill out—after these dreadful days, when once Bill's letters began to come regularly, assuring her that he was actually in less danger than if he were speeding his roadster at home; when her friends' eager interest and congratulations showed her that her son's eccentricity was an admired eccentricity—after that, she had settled down to accept the situa-

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tion with the calm of the unimaginative, a calm that never ceased to amaze Carrington, who, in spite of his intense sympathy with Bill's choice, his intense pride in it, died for him daily.

And then, after nearly two years, came the shell that, dropping on his ambulance, made of Allen and Adelaide Carrington one entity again, single in their rush to Bill, in their anguish, their devotion, their determination by sheer force of love to hold him with them. All through the boy's slow convalescence Carrington could retain this feeling of nearness to Adelaide. If, with the ebbing of their common agony, he lost a little the feeling that Adelaide was his wife, at least she remained very much his boy's mother. But now Bill was out of the nest again; not able to fly very well but out of the nest for all that. And Adelaide went back to her bazaars and her tableaux.

Well, Carrington reminded himself, what else was there, had there ever been, for the poor girl to do? A year or two of real house-

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keeping, not merely giving orders in an establishment as impersonal as a hotel. A year or two of supervising a nursery, and then no more nursery. Fond as she was of her son, Adelaide had not wanted another child. "It's just two years out of one's life," she had said. And then the money had come, her own inheritance, and his entrance into the partnership of Ledyard, Miller and Carrington. More and more money flowed in, and with it came more and more professional demands on Carrington's time and nerves, more and more social demands on Mrs. Carrington. By the time the firm had become Carrington, Canfield, Ross, and Hazzard, the senior partner and his wife seemed to share nothing but the formalities of life, to meet only for the purposes of that intricate game, "our social duties." Carrington used sometimes to wonder if Adelaide, too, missed something. But no, the limpid blue eyes under the carefully waved hair clouded only when the servants were too tiresome, or the temperamental artist failed at the last moment.

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Adelaide wondered why the soufflé was like this, why the window curtains were like this, but apparently she never was obsessed by her husband's wonder, why life was like this.

It was in January, four months and more after Bill's return, that one day Carrington went at his wife's behest to one of her war benefits, where he was to be presented to the Prince of Wales or Premier of France or Sultan of Zanzibar or some other foreign grandee who was shedding éclat upon the occasion. He had observed that when Adelaide wished to see him, it was usually for the purpose of introducing him to somebody else. The show, whatever it had been, was over when he arrived, and girls in all sorts of gorgeousness, shepherdesses, harem ladies, Lucrezia Borgias, were dancing, some with Napoleon's officers, or with Russian peasants, but most with sack-coated citizens of the day. Threading his way slowly around the edge of the room, he paused by a table whose occupants, a man and a maid, had not risen to

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dance. Of the girl, he had only noticed the dashing angle of a quill in a small black hat, when he became aware that the boy was smiling at him. He stepped forward, laying a hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Son, I'm happy to see you holding your own with the dancing-men." As he spoke he smiled toward Bill's companion—to find Mary Lea smiling at him.

"Why, Miss Lea!" he exclaimed.

"Miss Lea's been an angel, sitting out with me," Bill said. "Now you dance with her, Dad."

"Why," Carrington exclaimed a second time, "why, I can't dance with *Miss Lea*."

Bill seemed to enjoy his father's confusion as he had not enjoyed anything in years. "This table could dance with *her*," he laughed. "My game leg could, if I only dared let it. Take him round, Mary. The old thing's dying to, only he's scared."

The girl rose and putting her hand on Carrington's shoulder launched him into the stream. For a moment, doubts of his profi-

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ciency gripped him to the exclusion of any other thought. But Miss Lea could indeed dance with anybody. At once she so fitted her lithe step to his somewhat stiff and jerky progress that he perceived himself an excellent performer and was free to return her smile.

"I 'm glad you acknowledged me," she said.

"Can you suppose I could ever not acknowledge you?"

"In the peculiar circumstances, you mightn't have known what line it was best to take."

"Why, I did n't. So I obeyed that impulse. Besides, you gave me a lead. You were bowing to me."

"Yes, but it's not everybody can take a lead," she laughed, to add more gravely: "You see, it occurred to me an encounter like this might happen. So I told Bill long ago that I had met his mother and you. He knows about my rehearsing for weeks with those League girls: I let him infer that I had been introduced to you both at that time. Was that very 'managing' of me?"

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"No. Yes, a little. But I'm greatly indebted to you for it. If you had n't been far-seeing, as I was n't, if you'd been surprised at the encounter, as I was, if you'd decided on the unhallowed inspiration of the moment, as Bret Harte puts it, to play stranger—well, I'm afraid I never should have picked up your lead."

"We'd both have floundered, and had to make explanations to Bill. And as we never explained, three years ago, what *is* the use of going into it now?"

He smiled at her, less interested in her earnest words than in the earnest glowing face so close to his.

"How odd it does seem, Mary, dancing with you in the Ritz ball-room! We've never met off the island."

She paid his allusion a remembering look. "I do n't often cross to the mainland. It interferes with the routine. Besides, Schumann does n't approve of his stars being seen about all the time: he thinks it cheapens them. But this is a very particular party for some very

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particular orphans; he felt it to be worthy of me."

"Bill bring you?" It may have been the exigencies of the dance which made Carrington's question so brusque.

"Yes." She was bowing to some of the passing dancers, and offered nothing farther.

"I guessed he 'd seek you out the moment he could hobble off by himself."

"But he did n't. It was pure accident. I was walking across the park to take my three-mile trot around the reservoir when I came smack upon him, resting on a bench. He had his crutches then. I could n't dash by with my nose in the air. I do n't think he liked my stopping, at first. He was awfully ramrod, but when I said good-by he asked if he might come and see us."

"Three years ago did you use to trot round the reservoir?"

"You mean, he was there on purpose?" Her eyes widened in frank surprise. "I never thought of that! But I'm sure you're wrong. He seemed hurt to see me."

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"He might be and yet want to see you more than anything in the world."

After some turns in silence, she spoke thoughtfully. "He comes to the house a good deal; you can't very well tell a *bléssé* not to. I'm often not visible and he sits and talks to Myrtle. He seems to enjoy being a tame cat about. He does n't say one word of sentiment to me. How am I to say to him, 'Young man, I know my attraction for you is so fatal that I dare n't let you come within radius'?"

"I should think you might very well say it. That is, if you are as adamant as ever." At a quiver that crossed her face and was gone he asked, "Would you take him out of pity, Mary?"

"No. I'm too fond of Bill to do him that injustice."

They danced in silence till presently Carington said, "Mary, if you do take him, never be betrayed into giving up your work."

"No," she answered as gravely as he had admonished, "I never shall. But as to giving it up for him, 'nobody axed me, sir, she said,

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sir, she said.' Oh, dear! it's over! But there's some girl talking to Bill. Let's wait for the next one—that is, if you like dancing with me at the Ritz."

On the way home, after Carrington had met the illustrious foreigner—who, it appeared, after a brief interval for changing uniforms, was to dine with them—Adelaide suddenly put to him the same question that Miss Lea had put: "Did you enjoy dancing with Mary Lea?"

Now Carrington, though he had pointed out to Miss Lea that they were in the Ritz ball-room, felt, as soon as he took her in the circle of his arm, all the sensations of the island. The other people in the room no more inhabited his world than the passers in the street. It had actually never occurred to him that anybody was going to see him dancing. His start was so perceptible that his wife laughed.

"Oh, I know how you met her: Bill's been sitting with her the whole afternoon."

The unexpectedness of her placid tone almost took his breath away.

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"Do you suppose he's devoted again?" he brought out. (No hypocrisy there. He was not asking whether Bill was devoted but whether she supposed it.)

"I'm told—not by him—that they walk every day in the park."

"That sounds innocent."

His wife gave a shrug. "Oh, what do I know? Anyhow, Bill's three years older, and seems ten. He isn't one's baby any more. And, besides, she's made such a success, everybody thinks her so remarkable. The Fraziers know her; Gordon Payne, who wrote the play, is Dolly's first cousin. Dolly's enraptured if she can coax Mary Lea to the house."

The inference seemed to be that it didn't matter, if you were only famous enough. Well, Carrington reflected, that is just about the world's attitude. He inquired further: "Suppose they marry, Adelaide?"

"Well, there's Ethel Barrymore. It wasn't what I hoped, once. But he and Adèle never did get anywhere. And he's lived two years

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in France; and she's certainly very successful and distinguished. And"—she turned to her husband a wavering smile—"anyhow, he's not going to consult us."

Carrington took her hand.

"No, dear, and he should n't. It's his marriage. I'm sure that Miss Lea has many fine qualities, that we have only to know her to accept her. It's different from what you planned; but, then, in this life things always do 'come different' as my friend *Alice* complained about the poetry. And often they come better."

CHAPTER VIII

THE year wore on toward spring, the war clouds that had hovered so long gathering and blackening and dispersing and blackening again, till the country hardly believed them real clouds big with storm. Then came the Russian overturn and the man in the street's jubilant comment: "Now that Czarism's done with, just watch those Russians rear up and end the war! We'll never get a chance at it, it'll be all over before Mr. Wilson writes his ninetieth note."

One afternoon in early April, as Carrington was just preparing to leave his desk, his door opened without the formality of a knock, to admit Bill. His quick advance, his face proclaimed him the bearer of tidings.

"It's come," thought his father, and squared himself to receive it.

"Congratulations are in order, Dad."

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"They 'll be forthcoming, Son, be certain of that."

The offered hand Bill wrung painfully.

"I 've done it, Governor. I 've taken the plunge. I 'm engaged."

Carrington's voice pronounced—quite, he felt, without any direction from his brain—"That 's good. I 'm glad. I 'm delighted."

"I knew you 'd be, Dad. I knew *you* 'd be. I 'm not so sure of the mater."

Now the brain took command.

"It may not be such a surprise to her as you fear. If your mother once had other views," he smiled, "she 's given them up long ago."

Bill laughed. "Did she have 'em? I always suspected so. But she must have seen it was no go. Adèle and I are very fond of each other as sister and brother and that 's all. Mother was always partial to her because she was named for her and for no other reason on earth. Nobody that so much as looked at those two sisters could fail to prefer Marion."

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"No," said Carrington, perfunctorily, moving the letters on his desk and waiting for Bill to come to the point, "I believe I prefer Marion."

"Oh, my word, that's pretty tepid!" Bill protested. With a start his father looked up at him.

"Bill, are you telling me that you're engaged to *Marion Apgar*?"

"I certainly am. Why, Dad, *you* didn't think it was Adèle?"

"No," Carrington brought out, hardly knowing what he said, "no, I didn't think it was Adèle."

Bill's transparent skin flushed a little; he fidgeted and spoke.

"I know what you did think, Governor. You thought, I was attentive to—to Miss Lea?"

"Yes. Were n't you?"

"I've known her a long time, Dad. I never told you, but I knew her three years ago and more. I was glad to see her again—her and her friend who lives with her. It got around

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to the Apgars, and Marion"—his voice broke over the name—"Marion was hurt about it. That was when it first dawned upon me that she—she cared about me. And then I realized how much I cared for her. And—and that 's all."

"So now you 're engaged. I do congratulate you, Bill. That is, if——Marion 's a dear girl. She 's the daughter of old friends of ours, she 's been brought up as you have been, she speaks your language. If you can bring her your whole heart, you 're going to be much happier with her than with the lovely foreigner."

"Mary Lea 's American, good old Revolutionary stock," Bill answered literally, then added: "But I see what you mean. No, I 'm not mooning over Marion's shoulder at anybody else. She 's the best little pal! I was always mighty fond of her, only I thought of her as a kid. But she 's not a child, she 's the most womanly little thing." His gaze became vague as he sat smiling to himself, a shy, absorbed smile; then suddenly he took his father

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into the secret. Not since he gave the boy his first football suit, Carrington reflected, had Bill turned on him this shy, happy, altogether sweet smile. "She—she really *cares* about me, Dad. When you find out a thing like that, it—it hits you, you know. Especially when you have n't been exactly spoiled by kindness."

Carrington reached across the desk to lay his hand over Bill's.

"Dear old man, I 've no right to plague you. But are you sure——"

"Yes." Bill rose suddenly to make a turn about the room, came back to stand at the corner of the desk. "I did n't mean to tell you, but now I will. Yes, you have a right to plague me, when it's for Marion. I asked Mary Lea to marry me. I do n't mean three years ago, when I asked her every week. I mean, this spring. And she refused me. Not the way she used to, before, when we were always quarreling and making up, but very sweetly and flatly—and finally. She did care for me—not enough, but she did care—three

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years ago. Now she does n't, one atom. Even I saw it. It's all her career."

"I wonder, did you—did you make a condition that she leave the stage?"

Bill laughed shortly. "I did once. I loathe her being on the stage. But this try, I did n't. I'd learned it was no use. I said I'd share her with her work, be content with the core of the apple. But it seemed there was n't 'going to be no core.' " He fell into silent thought, after a moment continuing abruptly: "Dad, when I look back on that day, only about a month ago, I can't believe it was I. Marion may have caught me on the rebound but she's surely caught me. I do n't know why I ever tried to see Mary Lea again. I knew so well that we're as different as black from white, that we—that we could n't ever trot in double harness. I would n't go to see her—I called myself too proud—but I hung round where she'd be likely to see me—me and my crutches and my Croix de Guerre. I was as big an ass as that. And the crutches did touch her: Mary's got a heart for every purpose except

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falling in love. She can be a good friend. But she can't love any man. Never has and never will."

Again he was silent, thinking. Again he broke the silence himself:

"No, I do n't know what made me pick it up again, when I knew so well——But perhaps it's just as well I did, and got my down-right refusal. Because I guess I'd always have been wondering about her, wondering if the three years——Maybe that's her charm. She's so still, you never know what she thinks, what she's going to do. And so you keep on wondering about her. But now I do know. *Ni, ni, c'est fini*, as the French kids say. It's only a little while ago, but honestly, Dad, I feel as if it all happened in another existence. As if it happened to somebody else. It did happen to somebody else, not to the man that's engaged to Marion."

"Bill, I believe you. I believe it is over. Because you don't 'grouse' about it—to use one of the words you brought home. Because you can talk about it."

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Shyness again enveloped Bill, but he said steadily: "I'm glad I told you, Governor. Of course Marion does n't know. But I'm glad you do. Now I've got the last vestiges of it out of my system, and we'll never speak of it again. Shake hands with me, and I'll go home and break the news to Mother."

"No. Sit down a minute, Son. The news will keep. I've got a guilty secret of my own. As you say, I never meant to tell you. But you've been so open with me. It's this. I've known about you and Mary Lea almost from the beginning."

"You have!" Bill had not sat down, but was standing beside the chair, one hand on the back. Now he did sit, leaning forward across the desk. "What put you wise?"

"In the first place, an old friend of mine, Frank Fordyce. I see you remember." For Bill had turned a deep and angry red.

"If he is an old friend of yours, Dad, he's not one to be proud of. I knew he talked scandal about us: it got around to me. And he was our guest! But I did n't think he'd go to you.

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Mary said he would; she read him better than I did. What did he tell you? That we lived together on the farm?"

"Something like that."

"Dad, why did n't you come to me?"

Carrington returned Bill's straight look as straightly.

"Because I was obsessed with the notion of a vulgar harpy. I thought it would be the wisest policy, before saying a word to you, to go and see the girl and buy her off."

Bill's eyes were round with the surprise of this.

"You—you went? You saw her? When?"

"The morning after Fordyce told me, within a few days of the Sunday at the farm. It was almost three years to the day before that dance at the Ritz."

"She never told me. I saw her constantly for three or four months after that; she never told me." Bill's surprise at this phase of it gave way to stupefaction over another. "But, Governor, what happened? You went there to buy her off—a vulgar harpy—my mistress

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—to offer her money to clear out. *Mary!* Good God, I 'd expect the Marne to be tame beside that interview! And nothing comes of it! You go on the same as ever, she goes on the same as ever. Great Heavens alive, man! what happened?"

Carrington laughed a little. "She did. I told her to go ahead and marry you whenever she pleased."

Bill echoed the laugh. "Oh, well, then that was all right. As soon as you saw her, you knew it was all right. Did you chance to make the acquaintance of Myrtle Dewey? Of course, once you got a good look at her gingham aprons, you 'd know it was all right."

A light began to dance before Carrington's eyes, a light so blinding in its sudden flash, he could not be sure what he saw by it. He was a lawyer trained by the practice of a quarter-century never to betray surprise. Else, he would have jumped up, have shouted at Bill. But he remained silent and quiet in his chair, waiting for elucidation to come of itself.

"It was partly my fault," Bill ruminated.

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"The Fordyce version, I mean. I told him she was my sister. It was the silliest lie to pick out; of course I saw that, after. But I said it because she was on the stage. If it had been a girl of my own set, I'd have told him the truth—that we'd gone up there for midday dinner and been caught by the storm. And he'd have believed it of any girl as young and as nice as Mary. He might have thought we were running a bit wild, way up there without a chaperon, but he'd have seen we were all right, and he'd have protected her. But because she was a dancer, because she'd been a chorus girl, of course nobody could believe in her morals. Nobody'd dare to! To show himself such an innocent, such a hick! Fordyce is a man of the world; he could n't for one minute be taken in like that. Suppose I had n't lied, suppose I'd said to him: 'This is Mary Lea; I can't go call on her evenings because she's always busy. So I take her out Sundays, our only day, and we come here because she hates to be stared at, at hotels and places. This is the first time we

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have ever passed a night here, but if your wife was n't here, if Peter and Annie were n't here, it would be the same. I did n't bring her here to ruin her, I—I love her. But if I had, I could n't, because of Mary herself.'

"Suppose I'd said that to him, would he have believed me? Never! He was bound to put the worst construction on it all. Why, Dad, even you did, at first."

"Yes, I did, at first. Bill, you ask me why I did n't come to you——"

"No. I do n't. Not now. You went to Mary. That was better."

"Yes, I went to her first, on the harpy theory. But I never asked her to keep the visit a secret. I expected her to tell you, I expected you to come to me. When, after weeks, you had n't come, I knew she could n't have told you. Why she did n't, except that as you say she's always so still——"

"Yes, Mary's secretive. But we all seem to have been that."

"Billy, if I had thought three years ago

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that we could talk this over as we have to-day, without any rancor——”

Bill smiled. “You were perfectly right, Governor, we could n’t. I hope I ’m not the cub to-day I was three years ago. At any rate, I ’m not blind crazy on one subject, as I was then. Then, if you ’d said one word, I ’d have gone up in the air like a bronco at a Wild West show. You went to her, you had sense to see what Fordyce and his ilk could n’t see. And you said, ‘All right. It ’s your business, now work it out for yourselves. I ’ll be neutral even in thought.’ ” Coming round the desk, Bill laid one hand on his elder’s shoulder, while the other gripped his hand. “Do you know what I think, Dad? I think you ’ve acted more like a friend than a father.”

Carrington laughed as he returned the hand-clasp. “That meant for a bouquet, Bill?”

“You know it is. Just think of the jolly old rows and curses and turnings out-of-doors there might have been. But that isn’t the

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point, what you refrained from doing. The point is, what you did—believed in us. Are you coming home with me, Dad?"

"No, I can't, Son. I'll be along after a while. I have an appointment."

Though the appointment did not exist when Carrington mentioned it, two minutes after Bill had left him the telephone had made it a fact. Two minutes more saw him in a taxi, on his way to Mary's.

Myrtle let him in, to demand tensely without other greeting, "Ethan Allen! Is it war?"

He caught himself up from replying idiotically, "What war?" He had to stop and think what she meant.

"No, the correspondence still continues. Why, I did n't mean to frighten you. I told you it was nothing bad."

"Yes, I told Mary. But your voice sounded so——And of course, all anybody can think of these days is war."

"Yes, I suppose so," Carrington murmured, so vaguely that she stared at him. Then giving it up she said: "Mary's waiting for you

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in the sitting-room. I woke her. I would n't do that for Schumann himself."

Forgetting to thank her, he went up the stairs. The door stood open. By a wood fire newly lighted, Mary was seated, swathed rather than dressed in coils of some bluey-green stuff, the color of breakers. Her hair which she liked to pin so sleekly hung loose in a long braid, showing its curl.

If it is not every one who can rise out of the depths of a low chair—not clamber out, or pry oneself out, but rise smoothly as a breaker lifts itself from the sea—Mary could, flowing forward to meet Carrington. But he, turning to close the door after him, crossed the room to take up his stand at the corner of the mantel, one elbow on the shelf.

"Mary, why have you let me believe what was n't true?"

When he did not come to her outstretched hand she dropped back. In a lazy pose, she answered in a lazy voice, tinged with mischief, "Just what are you talking about, Ethan Allen?" But he knew that beneath the show

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of laziness she was on her guard. Myrtle had waked her to see him. She knew his was no casual call. He believed that she knew at once what his question meant.

"Bill's been with me," he explained further. "He's engaged."

"Ah!" she cried. "I'm glad. I'm very glad. It's the 'nice girl'?"

"Yes. I think it's going to be a fortunate marriage."

"I'm sure of it. He is n't in the least gone on me any more. He thought he might be, so he had to come and take a look. But he found he was n't, to his great relief."

Carrington smiled. "Your polite version leaves out one point, which Bill made no bones of mentioning. However, I do believe yours is in the main accurate. Bill is over it; that is, he's older than the school-boy that did n't know what it was to do without anything he wanted. He's seen people go without, he's gone without himself. He recognizes that he can't have you, and that it would n't mean happiness for either of you if he could. So

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he turns to something else. I also believe that if you were to smile—— However, I know you never will smile. So let's dismiss Bill. He's all right. But he is n't what I came to talk about."

Still she sat quiet, eyeing him a little quizzically but saying nothing. He had to push on, unaided.

"In all these years, I've never spoken your name to him. But to-day I did. Since we had all met at the Ritz, since I had heard in other ways that he had been attentive to you of late, this winter could be spoken of without reference to back history. But Bill told me, quite simply and without any questioning from me, the whole back history. Mary, can you ever forgive me?"

And still she regarded him with mischief in the depths of her eyes. "Bill's a gentleman. He'd never tell tales on any woman."

With a gesture Carrington brushed this aside. "It was n't chivalry, it was truth. Do you think I've examined witnesses all these years not to know truth when I hear it?" He

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laughed scornfully. "Why, when I told Bill that I went three years ago to see you, he breathed relief. He said at once: 'Oh, if you saw her, you'd see it was all right. If you ever caught sight of Myrtle Dewey's blue-checked aprons, you'd know it was all right.'"

Mary laughed, quite without echo of Carington's bitterness.

"You must have wondered how we managed Myrtle."

"Bill thanked me for my insight, for instantly perceiving the truth. Thanked me! That was what stung the most. Mary, why did you do it? Oh, of course, that first day I came to you, scolding, preaching, of course I see that you were too proud to speak. Though I don't see why you weren't too angry to keep still."

"I was n't angry at all."

"Why weren't you? Sanctimonious prig that I was! Of course you were angry. But afterward, when we became real friends—

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for we are friends, Mary? At least I thought so."

"Yes," she assented simply.

"Then why would n't you tell me? Did you doubt I'd believe you?"

"No, I knew you would."

"Then why need you hug your pride? I'd wronged you, yes. I did n't deserve generosity. But you are generous. Was it kind never to give me a chance to say, 'I'm sorry'?"

"*I am sorry now,*" she answered. "But it was n't pride at all. Nor anger. It was n't because you'd wronged me; I never felt you had. No, it was because you were so nice to me."

"Nice to you?" he echoed.

"Don't you see? You thought I had stepped over the line. Nobody feels the same toward a girl that does. But you were always just as polite as toward any lady-girl of your own world."

"I felt—nice—to you." It eased him to smile over her absurd adjective.

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"You always acted so, at any rate. Oh, one can argue—I've heard people—that the woman who gives herself shows a more generous nature than hers who always withholds. Men *say* that, but they don't *feel* it. They feel that the bars are down."

"You're ridiculous," he told her. "I treated you as I felt toward you. I never blamed you for—for what you call stepping over the line. An impulse of youth and warm-heartedness——No, no, I never felt you were the least bit smirched."

"You never betrayed the least consciousness of the smirch. That's what I've always loved in you. As for being *angry* with you, I was, when you first came in, because I had made up my mind to be. I resented your interfering; I *wanted* you to be unjust to me, so I could resent it the harder. I didn't wish you to be fair, but you were fair. Oh, yes, you were. Your facts were wrong. You thought I was living with Bill when I was n't. But that was no particular credit to me. You see, I didn't happen to want to."

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"Do I follow your reasoning?" Carrington smiled. "You think goodness is n't really goodness if it comes natural?"

"It 's nothing to pin medals on for. I never did waste away for Bill. What I wanted him for was a chum. If only he could have cut out the sentiment and behaved as if he 'd known me all his life and blacked my eyes when we were little! I know he could n't, and still I let him dangle. I used to tell him in words there was no hope, and still I let him dangle. All you said to me—if it did n't hit the facts, it hit me. I was n't doing what you thought, but I was doing wrong. I 'd kept my precious old chastity, but I 'd behaved just as badly, worse perhaps, more selfishly. I could n't get into a virtuous indignation with you. You need n't look so stirred about it, Ethan Allen. I was a guilty creature. Nothing 's changed."

"Everything 's changed!" burst from Carrington. "Oh, Mary, don't you see?"

He was down on his knees beside her, clutching her to him, his face pressed against

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her shoulder. After a moment, with a long, sighing breath, she put her arms around his neck.

He said presently, half aloud, his head still bowed against her: "I think I always loved you. I never faced it till to-day. But I always loved you, from the moment I went in at the studio door."

"I think I always knew it."

He raised his head, then, to look at her. They were silent, clinging together. Presently he said in the same undertone:

"My wife and I—we are friends, but—we have nothing in common, nothing but Bill. Now we have no longer to make a home for him. If——She might——consent to a separation——"

Mary loosened her clasp of him, to push him back. Her own low tone was trenchant.

"A Reno divorce and remarriage with an actress, like the latest Pittsburgh millionaire!"

A flush tinged his cheek-bones.

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"Mary! Mary, my darling! I won't give you up."

"You need n't."

A moment their eyes held each other's. Loosing her, he rose.

"Not that. Never that! No, dear. What I hated Bill for—hated the thought of—then to do it myself——!"

"You can't go to Mrs. Carrington out of a clear sky and ask her for a divorce. It's impossible, Ethan Allen. It can't be done. You simply can't do it." She laughed a little, shakily. "It's unnecessary to say any more. I know you. I know that you could no more ask her that—than you could beat her. But suppose you did. Bill of course would go with his mother. He'd never willingly speak to you again. Not alone the insult to her. He could never believe you'd played fair with him. Seeing your—infatuation—he could never believe we had n't been making love, all these three years. It would be such a hideous mess. Do n't you see that, Ethan?"

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"Mary, you talk this out like a lawyer. Are you thinking of it for the first time?"

"No. I have thought of it many times."

He lifted her up into his arms. In the low half-tone she was murmuring: "Oh, Ethan Allen! I've always cared for you. You were always such a friend to me. Always, always. You think you made me angry that first day: you did n't, you made me love you. That time you came to Milwaukee—do you remember? We drove to the station hand in hand?"

"I wanted to pick you up and run off with you under my arm."

"I'd have gone." Smiling, she raised her mouth to his, but he did not bend his tall head.

"No, no, heart's dearest. No, my darling. I've got to think. I can't, if you kiss me. Come, let's sit by the table. We've got to think this out."

Putting her in a chair, he walked around the broad, solid library table to a seat at the other side, then, leaning across the mahogany barrier, kissed her hand that lay upon it. Rais-

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ing his eyes again, he found hers full of tears. He had never seen her tears.

"Nobody's ever been—tender—with me, Ethan Allen. Even my dear father. My mother died in giving me birth. Father could never forgive me that. He was silent all the rest of his life—dour. He was always square with me, treated me as man to man, my truest friend. But he never 'made over me,' as Myrtle says. And Myrt herself—she'd go to the stake for me, but she would n't hold my hand."

Carrington pressed the hand he held. "But—all the suitors, Mary? They're nice boys, are n't they, some of them? Why must you pick out an old crooked stick like me?"

Making no answer to this obviously silly question, she drew her hand away from him, laid it with its mate in her lap, and, looking not at him, but at the table before her, began: "You can't marry me, Ethan. You can't take a step toward it, without stepping in mud. But—there's our island."

He looked at her, breathing hard like a

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runner, silent. She went on: "Conventions don't mean much to me, the way I was brought up, way off in the country, no woman to be telling me, 'A little lady does n't do that.' I was always firm that I would n't marry Bill, but I used sometimes to think I might live with him, just because he wanted me so much. (I never could see that not wearing a wedding-ring is something to be eternally damned for.) What kept me back—it was knowing that my feeling for him was just a sort of half-feeling, nothing permanent. Women are that way, I think, unless they've been spoiled. They want to give everything where they give at all. You said that day, after Bill I'd have a procession. I think I always knew that, by instinct. If I took him, just giving him a piece of myself, why not give a snippet to anybody?"

She looked up at last to smile at him.

"But this, Ethan Allen! When you're ten years older and have hardened arteries, I'll love you just as much. I wish you'd get lep-

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rosy or something, so I could show you how I 'd stick."

"How old are you, Mary, twenty-five?"

"I 'm grown up. I happened to be born a little later than you, but we 're the same age, Ethan, exactly. And we love each other. People that your whole being goes out to, flesh and spirit—you don't meet them on every corner like lamp-posts."

"No. No, you do n't."

"It is n't going to hurt anybody, Ethan Allen. Our island, all ours, that nobody knows about."

"What about Myrtle?"

Her eyes showed pain. "No, one could n't get around her. Myrtle would fly back to East Mendham. She would n't stay with me, but—but I do n't think Myrt would feel altogether hard toward me."

"It would hurt to lose her, Mary."

"Yes. But not as much as losing you."

"Mary, you child! How can I grab it and spoil it—your pretty youth!"

"My youth 's the thing that wants to be

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grabbed. Why, Ethan Allen, if you do n't take it, it will never be any good to anybody. It will just dry up before its time. I'll just harden, like most of these women you see about. But—I really could love, Ethan Allen, if you 'd let me try."

As she spoke, she was coming round the end of the table barrier. Carrington, rising, put out his hands to take hers, to hold her off.

"How do I stand it? How *do* I stand it?"

She slipped her hands out of his, standing quietly and gravely before him.

"Ethan, if it's on my account you scruple, you need n't. I know what I want. Our island—I believe it can always remain our secret. In this wilderness of a city! But if—any rumor should blow about—why, it could n't hurt me. I'm an actress and very successful. People would only shrug their shoulders and go buy more tickets.

"So, if it's on my account you hesitate, I'm gaining something so much greater than anything I could lose.

"If it's on your own—your own side of

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it—your own problems—that's for you to settle. Only, do n't scruple over me."

"Mary, how can I hesitate! How hold off, and you here saying that to me! My darling, I'm going now. I'll see you soon; we'll settle this. But let me go now."

CHAPTER IX

AS Carrington turned into Mary's block, he wondered what he was going to say to Myrtle Dewey at the door. For, in the interval, the President had broken off relations with Germany, Congress had determined that a state of war exists. Myrtle would be bursting over it. Well, a little later, he supposed he would burst, himself. He ought to. But to-day the war with Germany excited him about as much as the wars of the Peloponnesians.

To his relief, it was the Chinaman who let him in, who told him impersonally, as a phonograph might, to please walk upstairs.

To-day the sitting-room was filled with clear noon sun, instead of the gathering twilight of his last visit. Mary, in a street dress, point-device to the last hair, sat in the straight chair behind the big book-laden table. As he entered she looked at him much as she

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had done that first day he saw her—a look scrutinizing, guarded; not hostile, but ready to fight.

“I know what you’ve come to say,” she challenged him at once. “To say that it can’t be.”

He crossed to her side, touching his fingertips to her cheek.

“Do you say it can?”

“Yes, I do say so. But you’re a New-Englander. You think happiness is wrong.”

“I wish,” he said, with a slight smile, “my ancestors had emigrated to China instead of to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. If I were a mandarin, I could have you for my small wife.”

She put her hand over his, pressing it to her cheek.

“That would just suit me. I’d never grudge the great wife her honors—her possessions and her dignities as mother of the heir.”

Gently drawing away his hand he found a seat at the same side of the table, by the other end.

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"But this is n't China, dear."

"It can be!" she cried. "It's our island. It can be off the coast of China if we choose."

"Dear, we like to talk about our island—I started it, I know—but it's not true. We can't isolate ourselves. We can't divorce ourselves from the rest of the world. The world is always with us, worse luck!"

"Oh, if what you're afraid of is being found out!"

"I am!" he faced her gibe steadily. "I am afraid of just that. I should live in the constant fear of whispers, nasty whispers, coming at last by back ways to Mrs. Carrington and Bill. Rather than that, rather than the remotest risk of that, I'd tell her myself in the first place. And you have said that I can't do that."

She had no answer ready. When she spoke it was in the piteous tone of a child.

"But people—people like you and me—they do—they do."

"They do get away with it, you mean? They do keep their isolation? Perhaps they do."

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All we can know is, there's no public scandal. We don't know what hidden tragedy."

"It's a risk. You can't live without risk."

"All very well, if it's your own smash-up you risk. If it's other people's——" He rose to prowling about the room. "Mary, how I can talk to you? How I can help taking you in my arms and drugging myself dead to every other thought? How any man can be offered you and refuse! I'm no lover for you. Just a poor stick."

"You're the stick I want."

He came in his restless march to stand across the table from her.

"I haven't anything to give you, my darling. Not my name, not my care, not even my whole heart! In your arms I'd always be thinking of those others. Your life's all before you to make it as you choose, but mine is made. By the time a man has reached my age his life, the life he's made, has caught him, as that asphalt lake caught the animals. He's not an independent unit; he's part of a pattern, he can't cut himself out. Do you un-

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derstand what I mean? I do n't mean that Sixty-eighth Street is so precious to me. My God! I come pretty close to hating it. But I'm part of it and it's part of me."

"I do understand. And I do n't ask you to cut yourself out. All I ask is just a little corner for mine, in your busy life. Ethan Allen, if—if we just—love each other—for a little while? At the first breath of rumor we'd end it."

"And you wanted permanence."

"Oh, what I want. Fifty years of you! But I'd take what I could get. And I'd play fair. When I must let you go, I'd let you go. I could, if I'd ever had you. But to come so near and never have anything at all!"

He had to tramp the room again before he could answer her.

"Mary, it is n't all for them. It's for you. I can't do this—to you."

She sprang to her feet then to make a pace toward him.

"If it's for me! I've told you how long to pause for me!"

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"But I do pause. Mary, you think because you can earn your own living, you're a grown-up woman. To me, twenty-five is a baby. So young, so young! If I let you give yourself to me—— Some day there 'll come along the man who's your proper mate, your age, free to love you. And you've thrown yourself away, to me."

She dropped back in her chair again, and with her chin on her hand said deliberately: "Ethan, as you remembered, I was speaking of permanence. Perhaps we can't be together long; that's perhaps not in our power. But the feeling can be permanent. I don't care for people easily. And when I do, I don't change, ever. This Prince Charming of yours—I don't believe in him, you know. He would n't be like you; nobody's like you. And if he was n't, I'd never notice him. But of course, you'll answer that I'm young, that I don't know whom I'll like at thirty-five. All right, we'll imagine a Prince Charming. If I was a widow, or a divorcée, my past would never bother him. Then why should it now?

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You and I 'd like to marry—that is, to make public acknowledgment of our love—but we can't. So we meet on the island. I'll tell Prince Charming. If he's too much of a prig to stand it, he can ride away again. Mary Lea does n't want him."

Carrington came over to her side, to press her head against him, to stroke her hair. She sighed presently.

"This does n't mean you will. This means you won't."

"Mary!" his voice was a husky whisper. "Oh, my Mary darling!"

"I know," she said. "I've always known. I guess that was the real bed-rock reason why I kept back the truth about Bill and me. So long as that—bar of consanguinity—raised up a barrier between us, you could come to see me sometimes, you could be my friend. I was always afraid to let it down. I knew you'd walk away."

He moaned something inarticulate.

"I know," she repeated. "It's furtive and

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sneaky and underhand, and you can't bear it. Even to get me, you can't bear it."

He slipped down to his knees, clasping her waist. His shoulders in her lap shook.

"It's all right," she whispered in a voice as choked as his own. "It's all right, Ethan Allen. I knew you could n't. It's all right."

How long they clung together, neither ever knew. The time came when he was on his feet.

"I'm going, Mary. And I'm not coming back."

"Not—not just to see me? Not ever?"

"We can't be just friends, dear. We've stood out, to-day, but—oh, my Mary—that's not my Mary—good-by, good-by!"

"Ethan, you've never kissed me. Not once. I'm being good. I'm letting you go. But—once, Ethan Allen?"

He gathered her in his arms while they kissed, quietly, tenderly, like lifelong friends. He loosed her and was gone.

Five minutes later, Myrtle came in, spoke to her friend's back, at the window.

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"Mary! Do tell! Is Bill going back in the war?"

Mary made a vague sound which Myrtle interpreted as a question.

"Why, I met his father just now in the street. He walked straight by me without seeing me, with the tears all over his face."

Mary turned, attempted to speak, and burst into a passion of crying.

Myrtle's face of bewilderment changed to concern, to comprehension. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she said aloud, too low to be heard through Mary's sobs. Sympathy poured from her eyes, but she made no movement toward the crumpled figure flung down among the couch cushions.

Presently, when the tempest was quieting, she spoke in her usual manner of meeting a crisis, fluttered but determined:

"Mary, I won't pretend I do n't know what it is. I guess I do know. Of course, I've always seen how you set by Ethan Allen, and how he sets the world by you. Only—I did n't expect he'd ever *say* it."

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Mary lifted her convulsed face. She was not weeping as she wept on the stage.

"Neither did he. Nor I. It happened."

"Yes, I presume so," Myrtle assented, coloring in her shyness. "I presume it does just happen. Some things can't be pent up forever. I do n't mean I blame him."

"He 's not to blame."

"Mary," Myrtle almost forgot her diffidence in her earnestness, "you got one comfort. In all the time you and Ethan Allen have known each other—and looking back now, I see how you turned to one another from the first—in all the time, you have n't got a thing to be ashamed of."

"And mighty cold comfort that is!"

"It 's all the comfort there is."

"Do n't give me any credit, Myrtle. It is n't *my* fault if we have n't broken any commandment. I want to. I told him so. Think what you please."

"I think," said Myrtle, "you made it pretty hard for Ethan Allen."

At this Mary's defiance melted to a wail.

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"Oh, Myrt! Not so hard as I could have! I tried to play fair. I offered myself to him, but I did n't try to hold him. I let him go in peace." Her voice went up a key, "*Peace!*"

"There would n't be any peace the other way." In the midst of complete seriousness, Myrtle smiled her reticent smile. "I do n't know about you, Mary. What you want, you 're so set to get. Maybe you would have been happy for a while, just getting Ethan. But he would n't have had an easy minute. All your prettiness, all your loving, could only have made him miserable—and more miserable. When you come to see that, why your heart would break."

"Yes," Mary sighed a quivering breath. "Yes, that was it. The only reason I let him go. The reason I had to let him go."

"Mary," Myrtle said gently, "you 're awful young. You feel—children do—that this moment 's going to last forever. Time 's like a stream, I always think. You 're not standing in one place; you can't. The stream flows on,

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and you with it. Flows on to something different."

"Oh, yes, say it! Say I'll forget. Forget and be happy."

"I do n't know," said Miss Dewey, "as He made the universe specially so you could be happy."

Mary's eyes widened, she gasped, and quavered into a laugh.

"Why, Myrt! Why, Myrtle! Do you know, I believe I always thought He did!" She drew a long, sobbing breath. "You'll answer, 'Children do'!" Giving her eyes a final dab, she held up the wet handkerchief. "Oh, you white feather!" she cried to it, and flung it in the fire. "Myrtle, what are you and I going to do in this war?"

THE END

